Chaim Herzog:
The War of Atonement
Little, Brown & Co. Boston, 1975.

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The New Strategic Concept

FOR THREE WEEKS in May and June 1967, the people of Israel lived through a trauma they would not easily forget. As Arab armies massed around their borders, the United Nations Emergency Force (which since the Sinai Campaign in 1956 had been dividing between the Israeli and Egyptian forces and manning the Straits of Tiran leading into the Gulf of Akaba) was ordered to withdraw by President Nasser. United Nations Secretary General U Thant – without so much as consulting the Security Council or the General Assembly – agreed to the withdrawal without demur. Egyptian forces poured into Sinai, while Jordanians and Syrians concentrated along their frontiers with Israel; Iraqi and Kuwaiti units, as well as some from other Arab countries, moved towards Israel's borders. The country was ringed by a vast Arab army – outnumbered in troops, planes and tanks. The Soviet Union took its usual cynical part in playing down this escalation in the United Nations, an escalation which according to President Nasser had been instigated to no small degree by the Soviets themselves, who had falsely advised the Syrians about the concentration of Israeli forces on their borders.

As Arab hysteria rose and the Arab media promised the Israeli population – men, women and children – destruction and annihilation in the most brutal manner, the horrors of the Nazi holocaust rose to the fore in Jewish consciousness. The Jewish people knew that these were not mere words, recalling how many nations nurtured on the tenets of Christianity had either participated in the bloody massacre or had looked on. And indeed the world looked incapable of taking action.

On the morning of 5 June Israel struck – and within six days had destroyed a great part of the force which had threatened it, occupying the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan and the Golan Heights. This transformation from a potential helpless victim into a brilliant victor created a euphoria which brought about a revolutionary change of attitude in Israel. Against the background of sombre prospects a few days before, their incredible victory evoked a reaction throughout the Jewish world such as Israel had never known or experienced.

The origins of the Yom Kippur War can be found to a very considerable degree in the Six Day War, which had a profound effect on both sides to the conflict, changing in no small measure Israel's social and political life and dictating basic changes in its strategic thinking. It acted as a catalyst in the Arab world and gave rise to a complete re-evaluation of the military posture of the Egyptians, who drew conclusions from every aspect of their defeat and set about putting their military house in order with active Soviet support. The Israelis on the other hand swept under the carpet all the shortcomings that had been revealed in the war but had been overlooked in the euphoria of victory; consecrating mentally the military concepts that had emerged from the six days of war, they prepared for the next war as if it were to be the seventh day.

As a result of the armistice line in 1949, before the 1967 war Israel was living in a precarious military situation because of its **lack of strategic depth in which to deploy (their deployment area in the event of war would have to be in enemy territory),** and indeed this was frequently enunciated by Israeli leaders when spelling out the country's defence policy. Furthermore the very nature of Israel's borders meant danger: the Gaza Strip occupied by the Egyptians in 1948 was like a dagger poised against the main centres of population in southern Israel and along the coast; Jerusalem was divided and on a number of occasions Jordanian soldiers or local Jordanians had opened fire in the middle of the city with all that that had entailed. An advance by Jordanian troops of some 500 yards from areas along the main road to Jerusalem would have cut the main artery to the capital of Israel. Jordanian forces stationed on the hills above Kalkilyeh looked down upon Tel Aviv and its satellite cities, accommodating some 40% of Israel's population, while those stationed at Tulkarm observed the coastal city of Netanya, 10 miles away, fully aware of the fact that an armoured thrust by them across this short distance would cut the State of Israel in two at its narrow waistline. On the Golan Heights Syrian troops looked down on the Israeli villages in the Jordan Valley and harassed them with fire over the years.

This situation brought the Israeli General Staff to the conclusion that whenever the danger of military conflagration arose, Israel could not afford to

permit the Arabs to take the initiative, for such an initiative could spell disaster. It was clear that the sheer momentum of an attack by the Arab forces could cut the country at Netanya or the main road to Jerusalem and overrun Israeli villages along the Gaza Strip or endanger the northern part of east Galilee. Thus any serious deterioration in the situation which might lead to war automatically obliged the Israeli General Staff to plan a pre-emptive attack.

At various periods *fedayeen* marauders had roamed about the country threatening even the very populated areas, but in 1956 *fedayeen* attacks from the Egyptian-held Gaza Strip had become intolerable and had led to a process of escalation along the front lines. Seeing war as imminently possible and taking into consideration what were thought to be favourable international circumstances, Israel had launched an attack against Egypt in the so-called Sinai Campaign. Again in 1967, when it had become evident that war was approaching, the Israeli Command had concluded that the Arabs must not be allowed to make the first move because by their sheer weight they would gain initial advantages that Israel could not afford. And so despite the very serious international political considerations which exercised both the Israeli Government and President Nasser – neither desiring to be branded as the attacker – Israel's lack of strategic option had left its forces with no alternative but to take the initiative on 5 June.

The depth afforded by the territories taken by Israel in the Six Day War gave the country for the first time in its history a strategic option. All Israeli centres of population were now removed from the Egyptian forces, and a desert barrier some 150 miles wide separated Israel from the Suez Canal, in itself a natural barrier of no mean proportions. **The cities which would now be affected by the outbreak of war would not be Israeli cities but the Egyptian cities along the Suez Canal – Port Said, Ismailia, Suez – with a total population exceeding some 750,000 people. An Egyptian commander thinking of attacking Israel now would have to plan not only the very formidable task of crossing the Canal against opposition but also of developing a major attack across the Sinai Desert. Thus, it seemed to the Israelis, very heavy considerations would weigh against the renewal of hostilities against this new line.**

A similarly favourable situation also obtained along the Jordanian front; the holy city of Jerusalem was now united and far removed from the Jordanian artillery which twice in twenty years had shelled it mercilessly. Instead of having to move but a few hundred yards in Jerusalem or on its approaches in order to achieve a gain or to advance a mere 10 miles in order to cut the country in two, the counter-attacking Jordanian Army would now be obliged to mount a major attack across the Jordan River and then fight its way across the Judean [illegible] through easily defensible mountainous terrain for a distance of some

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40 miles. Even on the Syrian front the Israeli forces now had a certain, however limited, degree of depth, which made life easier for the villages in the northern Galilee and relieved them from the nightmare of incessant shelling and raising children in shelters.

The Israeli General Staff could therefore now exercise an option by either launching a pre-emptive attack if war seemed imminent or alternatively allowing the enemy the first strike – with all the international political disadvantages of such a move accruing to him – and thereafter utilizing the depth afforded by the Sinai Desert to manœuvre, concentrate and counter-attack. Furthermore, the distance from the Egyptian airfields to Israeli centres of population had increased considerably and the electronic warning time now available to Israel was some sixteen minutes instead of the four minutes before the Six Day War. This strategic situation constituted a main factor in convincing the Israeli Government and leaders of opinion that there was little danger of the renewal of hostilities in a major war against Israel.

But as these strategic advantages were discussed, sight was lost of the fact that an Egyptian-held Sinai Peninsula had been a major warning element as far as the Israeli forces were concerned: the movement of Egyptian forces into Sinai across the Suez Canal invariably sounded the alarm in Israel and allowed mobilization to be carried out in adequate time. This had occurred on a number of occasions and in particular in 1967. The eyeball-to-eyeball situation created along the Suez Canal after the Six Day War, however, with the bulk of the Egyptian Army stationed constantly in almost direct contact with the Israeli forces, removed this very important element of advance warning. It enabled the Arab forces concentrated along the Canal to move over to attack from their existing deployment in the shortest possible time.

Indeed the shortening of warning time as a result of these new frontiers was the reason for the considerably increased forces which Israel was obliged to maintain along its borders after the Six Day War. Numerous war games were conducted to test the various strategic and tactical aspects of these new defensive lines; all such games being based on the assumption of a very short warning period, with the standing army holding the attack until the reserves were mobilized within a period of some seventy-two hours.

A few weeks after the conclusion of the Six Day War, the first incidents had broken out along the Suez Canal front when the Egyptian forces which were regrouping along the west bank began to harass the Israeli forces deployed along the Canal. Fighting broke out at Ras el-Aish at the northern end of the sector between Port Said and Kantara, but the Israeli positions were makeshift and inadequate for protection. By November 1968, a year and a half after the conclusion of the war, the Egyptians, whose army had been reconstructed and

re-equipped by the Soviet Union, felt strong enough to embark on a major war of attrition and in that month they launched a major artillery attack on the Israeli forces, catching them unprepared and comparatively unprotected. In one attack alone eighteen Israeli soldiers were killed. The Israeli reaction was to mount an in-depth commando operation against Najh Hamadi in the Nile Valley, destroying electricity installations and emphasizing Egypt's basic vulnerability to attack by mobile Israeli forces. The shock of this Israeli attack convinced President Nasser that he was not yet fully ready for a war of attrition and he accordingly postponed it until March 1969. During the breathing space accorded by this decision, the Israelis concentrated all their efforts to create a line that would answer the requirements of such a war.

Lieut.-Gen. Chaim Bar-Lev, the chief of staff, entrusted Maj.-Gen. Avraham ('Bren') Adan with the task of heading an interservice team to bring to the General Staff a proposal for the creation of a defensive system in Sinai. Before this team went down to Sinai, Maj.-Gen. Yeshayahu Gavish, general officer commanding the Southern Command and the commander of the victorious Israeli forces in the Sinai in the Six Day War, weighed the problems posed by the defence of Sinai. Having regard to the losses incurred as a result of the Egyptian shelling, it was obvious to him that the troops holding the line must be given adequate cover in strongpoints; the main problem facing him however was whether to keep his forces on the water line or to maintain them in depth away from it. While holding the water line in strength created a series of fixed objectives under constant observation of the Egyptians, at the same time it gave the Israeli forces the advantage of observation and an ability to deal immediately with any crossing attempt by the Egyptians. Gavish came to the conclusion that it would be advisable to hold positions on the water front, particularly at all points which were probable crossing areas, since he felt there would be no problem for the Egyptians to cross along the entire length of the Canal, and the Israelis had to be prepared to answer this possibility.

In 1968 Gavish commanded the Israeli forces in war games in which Maj.-Gen. Mordechai ('Motta') Gur, who was appointed chief of staff of the Israel Defence Forces after the Yom Kippur War, acted as the commander of the Egyptian forces. In these games Gur crossed along the entire front, advancing on all the major axes and deploying helicopter-borne forces in depth behind the Israeli front line exactly as five years later President Sadat's forces were to do. Thus already in 1968 the concept of a possible Egyptian attack had been taken into account by members of the Israeli Command.

Drawing on his experience as a member of Kibbutz Nirim near the Gaza Strip, Adan set about planning the defence of the line along the Suez Canal. He drew up the original plans for the fortifications, to be sited along the Canal

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and built in such a way as to give a maximum degree of observation – good visual observation by day and electronic observation by night – while exposing a minimum number of troops to enemy artillery fire. He planned the individual fortifications for a force of fifteen troops, at a distance of 7 miles one from the other, with mobile armour patrolling between them and with artillery and armour deployed to the rear ready to move forward and to destroy any attempt to cross. The fortifications were conceived as a warning outpost system; they were not seen as a line of defence, hence the limitation to fifteen troops, the distance between them and their limited defensive facilities. Gavish accepted Adan's plan with the proviso that at the northern end of the Canal all possible crossing points be covered by groups of fortifications. The Israeli defence plan based on this warning system along the Canal was brought to the General Staff for approval. Maj.-Gen. Ariel Sharon, director of training in the General Staff, and Maj.-Gen. Israel Tal, attached to the Ministry of Defence, opposed it. They proposed to deploy only with armour at a certain distance from the Canal and to control it by mobile armoured activity.

Gavish has since explained publicly his attitude to this problem. He saw the line acting in time of war as a series of observation posts and fortifications along all possible axes of advance, which would delay the enemy before he came on a series of defensive infantry brigade localities with their concentrated force of armour along the line of the passes, from the Mitla Pass in the south to Baluza in the north. During a war of attrition and in periods of cease-fire the fortifications would serve as observation posts (affording protection from artillery fire during the former); as well as centres for electronic warning and control and as bases for armoured patrols. As part of the defences along the Canal, Gavish initiated a system of fuel installations which could be activated from inside the fortifications to set the Canal alight.

It has always been Gavish's opinion that if the Canal was to be considered a physical barrier, there was no option but to establish a physical presence along it. In his view one of the main dangers which Israel would have to face would be a sudden Egyptian move to gain a foothold, however narrow, along the east bank followed by an attempt to achieve an immediate cease-fire by international agreement. Furthermore, since the Israeli concept invariably called for mounting a counter-offensive into the enemy's territory, it was important for them to sit in force along the Canal itself and not be in a position which would require fighting before they reached it.

In the ensuing debate there was no suggestion of leaving the Canal, but there was an argument as to the mode of deployment, with Gen. Sharon supporting the system of mobile defence along the Canal. Gen. Bar-Lev decided in favour of the fortifications and the team headed by Gen. Adan

proceeded to supervise the construction of the line, which was finished on 15 March 1969. That month Nasser declared the opening of the War of Attrition and the whole system was tested out: for days on end the Egyptians employed over 1,000 artillery pieces against the Israeli forces dug in along the Canal. There is no doubt that but for these fortifications Israeli casualties would have been much heavier than they were in fact and could have reached very alarming numbers.

However the fortifications were only one element in what was later to be called the Bar-Lev line. It was not a single marginal line of defence: each fortification controlled ½–1 mile on each of its flanks and the area of some 5–6 miles between the fortifications was covered by observation points and patrols. In all the very problematic and critical fortifications – as for instance in the positions at the two extremes of the line and in isolated strongpoints – tanks were sited. To the rear there were concentrations of tanks, while platoons of them were stationed within the areas of the fortifications themselves with the ramps from which they operated sited to give enfilade fire along the Canal. Large numbers of such positions were created; these were in addition to firing ramps which were built ½–1 mile to the rear of the fortifications affording them covering fire as well as to the approaches to the Canal. On top of this a vast infrastructure of roads, underground headquarters, water and communication systems, repair facilities and stores was constructed.

When the line was established during the War of Attrition, it was standard operating procedure during an emergency for troops of the standing army or reserve parachute troops to replace all reservists in the line. The positions were brought up to full establishment of approximately thirty per position, while in isolated positions, such as the 'Quay' fortification at Port Tewfik, there would be some eighty to ninety troops. In all isolated positions and fortifications, command would be taken by an officer of field rank of major or above, usually a reservist from the parachute forces. Bar-Lev made it a practice to have reservists training in the area of the Sinai during periods of tension. On the water line he maintained a force of two armoured brigades with a third armoured brigade in reserve, adding a fourth (usually reservists training in the area) during periods of tension.

It is not possible to interpret Israel's military concepts on the eve of the Yom Kippur War without considering the effect of the War of Attrition on its thinking. The War of Attrition – initiated by Egypt in March 1969 – has been regarded as a passing event when in fact it was a major confrontation. The Egyptian forces launched the war with the declared purpose of creating a situation whereby the Suez could be crossed in strength and the Sinai reoccupied; Israel, for its part, was determined to prevent this development and to

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re-establish the cease-fire. In choosing to launch the War of Attrition, the Egyptians decided to take advantage of the static military situation created by the fact that both forces were ranged along the Suez Canal. This meant that Israel would not be in a position to take advantage of its undoubted superiority in manœuvre and fast-moving armoured warfare – the Suez Canal would prevent large-scale movements and would in fact protect the Egyptian forces from Israeli manœuvre. Taking shelter behind it, the Egyptians would thus initially attempt to exhaust through attrition the Israeli will to continue the fight.

The construction of the Israeli Bar-Lev line in its massive form following the Egyptian artillery barrages in October 1968 became a major consideration in their decision to commence the War of Attrition. And an analysis of these events tends only to emphasize the irony of a situation whereby Egyptian action led to the construction of the line, which in turn aroused the fears and apprehensions of the Egyptians. They saw in its construction the creation of a permanent, impregnable Israeli presence which would only perpetuate the *status quo* and limit drastically the prospects of changing the situation along the Canal. The Egyptian plan therefore was for artillery bombardment to destroy as much as possible of the line in the first stage of the War of Attrition. Once the Israeli fortifications had been destroyed to a great extent, the second stage called for a series of limited crossings by Egyptian commandos for short periods of time; the third phase called for more extensive operations in depth across the Canal, while the fourth and final stage would be a full-scale crossing operation with the object of occupying sectors of the east bank of the Canal and thus breaking the political deadlock which had set in since 1967.

An intensive bombardment of the Israeli positions was carried out during March and April 1969. In May President Nasser announced that 60% of the Bar-Lev line had been destroyed by artillery fire and that his minister of war, Mahmoud Fawzi, had advised him that the remaining 40% would soon be dealt with. (In fact the Bar-Lev line had very successfully withstood the battering it had received and had vindicated the hopes of its planners.) In mid-April Egyptian commando units began to cross the Suez Canal regularly and to attack Israeli fortified positions. This led to counter-bombardment by the Israeli forces and reprisal raids along the Egyptian line by their parachute and commando units. The fighting escalated along the Suez Canal and indeed along the Gulf of Suez, with Israeli forces attacking targets in the Gulf and inside Egypt. Israeli casualties rose alarmingly during this period, and by July they decided to commit their air power. The initiative passed to Israel and the War of Attrition became a war of counter-attrition.

During the months that followed Israeli air attacks destroyed the Egyptian SAM 2 surface-to-air missile system along the Canal and extended into the Gulf of Suez. The Egyptians were now left without any meaningful air defence potential along the Suez front and had to abandon the third part of their original plan – crossings by army units into the Sinai – being obliged as they were to concentrate all their efforts on combating the Israeli counter-attack. In January 1970 deep-penetration raids by the Israeli Air Force began in Egypt, while at the same time Israeli forces engaged in commando activity, landing on Shadwan Island in the Gulf of Suez. At this point came a major turning point in the Middle East from an historic point of view with Nasser's secret visit to Moscow and the subsequent arrival of Soviet equipment and personnel in Egypt.

The final phase of the War of Attrition began in April 1970 when the Israeli air forces ceased raiding the Egyptian hinterland. The Soviets had taken Egyptian air space under protection and this had enabled the Egyptians to concentrate all their forces in the area of direct combat with Israel along the Suez Canal. Egyptian air and land attacks became very intense; Israeli attacks along the Canal increased. The conflict entered a ferocious phase.

It was now clear to the Egyptians that the answer to their problem was a redeployment of the surface-to-air missile system. While deployment of SAM 2 sites behind the Canal zone would affect Israeli operations over Egypt, the deployment of missiles in the Canal zone itself could create a problem for Israeli planes over the Israeli front line, where Israeli planes some 12 miles into Sinai would be within range of Egyptian missiles. This in turn would increase Egyptian ability to cross the Canal in strength. Although Israeli counter-attacks against these attempts to edge the missile system forward to the Canal were successful, their losses rose and soon they began to lose planes to the Egyptian missile defences.

Parallel to this military escalation, diplomatic moves were afoot. In July 1970 Nasser announced his acceptance of the cease-fire which was to commence on 7 August. But immediately it had come into effect, the Egyptians and the Soviets connived to move forward the missile system under its cover and to achieve the necessary military basis for an ultimate crossing of the Canal – the setting up of a missile screen which would cover the Israeli side on the east bank and neutralize their Air Force. In answer to questions at the Arab Socialist Union on 24 July 1970, President Nasser implied that he had agreed to the cease-fire for the specific purpose of moving forward the missile umbrella to the bank of the Suez Canal. And although he revealed publicly the next and final phase – the creation of a bridgehead across the Canal under cover of this missile umbrella – few paid any attention to his announcement.

For Israel the war ended with many question marks about the missile problem. For while their war of counter-attrition against the Egyptians had

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had its effect, the cease-fire was certainly welcome, faced as they were with the option of continuing to squander their air power along the Canal or escalating the battle while challenging the Soviet Union. Furthermore the war had not been easy in terms of casualties, with black borders appearing every day in the Israeli press around the photographs of the troops killed the day before. It had been essentially a war of nerves and for the Israeli public, accustomed to rapid and swift results in wars with the Arabs, this was not a situation that helped morale.

It would now appear that Nasser's aim was indeed to attempt the next phase of his plans – the seizure of part of the east bank under cover of the missiles – but at this stage a number of events occurred which affected the military situation and had a direct effect on the military thinking of the Israeli leadership. On 28 September 1970 President Nasser died. He was the outstanding charismatic leader of the Arab world who had succeeded in uniting behind him the Egyptians and the Arabs in their struggle against Israel. His departure therefore meant that a major element in such a struggle – effective leadership – was now absent. Parallel to his efforts to eliminate the presence of the Western powers in the Middle East, Nasser had devoted much of his efforts to mobilizing the Arab world against Israel and had been the prime mover in an Arab anti-Israel policy. More than any other single man he had been instrumental in creating the Soviet presence in the Middle East; now he had departed, leaving behind him a country with serious internal political problems and a leadership which appeared to be utterly lacking in charisma and power.

The American response to Israel's request in September 1970 for additional arms was for the first time open and unequivocal: in view of the Arab world and of the Eastern Bloc, Congress was asked by the Nixon Administration to approve the sale to Israel of half a billion dollars' worth of the most sophisticated equipment being delivered by the United States to foreign countries. This fact was not lost on the Arabs – and certainly not on the Soviet Union – and added an additional element of confidence to Israeli thinking. A further important occurrence was the civil war in Jordan in September 1970, in which King Hussein had eliminated the Palestinian uprising, thus creating a situation in which Israel's Jordanian frontier became peaceful. The United States' unequivocal reaction to the attempted invasion of Jordan by the Syrian forces during this civil war was an encouraging factor too, demonstrating as it did American purpose in maintaining the balance in the area and in blocking Soviet expansionism. All these factors combined to create an atmosphere which in due course contributed to an obstinate unwillingness on the part of the Israeli military and political leadership to believe that a situation could exist in which the Arab world would seize military initiative and move against Israel.

On 7 August 1970 the cease-fire due to last for ninety days commenced. The Israeli command decided to take advantage of this period of grace to reconstruct those parts of the Bar-Lev line which had been damaged in the War of Attrition and to strengthen it. Gen. 'Arik' Sharon had in the meantime taken command in the south and a major construction effort was undertaken to strengthen all the positions and strongpoints along the Canal. Following a proposal put forward by him, a second line of fortifications was constructed some 5 to 7 miles to the rear, for, as he pointed out, the tanks and the artillery did not have adequate cover. Eleven such fortifications were built in addition to an infrastructure of roads and artificial barriers, such as a sand rampart (at some points 27 yards high) designed to make the east bank of the Canal impassable to armoured vehicles. Extensive minefields were laid, wire defences were erected and roads were even built over the marshy swamps in the northern sector; airfields were improved; underground headquarters were constructed and fuel tanks added. In all 2 billion Israeli pounds ($500,000,000) was spent in the whole of Sanai, of which a total of approximately 150 million Israeli pounds ($40,000,000) was spent on the fortifications.

Gen. Israel Tal was unhappy with the stepped-up construction activities and in October 1970, during the first phase of the cease-fire, expressed his reservations about the entire system for the defence of Sinai. He pointed out that the fortifications were proving to be ineffective (as in any case the Egyptians were crossing the Canal) and had become a series of fixed targets vulnerable to flat trajectory fire constantly under observation with visible supply lines which invited attack. He maintained that the fortifications were not an effective fighting unit; they could be neutralized by artillery fire and could be by-passed; at best they constituted only a shelter and the Israeli artillery was inadequate, in his view, to support them. They made a small contribution to defence, were isolated and not mutually supporting and could not prevent a water crossing by day or by night. Pointing out that of 498 Israeli casualties in Sinai between 7 January and 28 July 1970, 382 (including 62 dead) had been caused inside the fortifications or in direct relation to them, he suggested a system whereby mobile armoured forces with artillery and anti-aircraft support would be responsible for sectors with tanks in observation points along the water line. They would reinforce the fortifications which, since they already existed, would be lightly manned.

His view met with considerable opposition. Those who opposed it, including the minister of defence and the chief of staff, maintained that any attempt to hold the line without a physical presence on the ground along the Canal would be bound to encourage a creeping-forward process by the Egyptians which would ultimately place the Israeli forces in a very difficult situation (a very high

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percentage of the losses had been caused by ambushes, mines, missiles and artillery activity against armoured patrols and the engineering forces operating outside the fortifications). Those opposing Tal argued that his system would in the end create areas which would not be under Israeli control. Indeed, those areas which had not been held by Israeli forces along the Canal during the War of Attrition had frequently been occupied for short periods by Egyptian forces. For varying periods Egyptian forces had occupied an abandoned Israeli fortification in the area between the Firdan Bridge and north of El-Balah Island in the Suez Canal; they had frequently trained in this fortification, mined the area around it and on many occasions hoisted the Egyptian flag over it. Patrolling along the Canal frequently involved mine-clearing operations and encounters with ambushes, a situation which would become much more serious if Israeli forces were to abandon the fortifications along the Canal entirely. Indeed, there were areas, such as in the south of the Canal, where every time that Israeli forces entered, many mines had to be cleared.

With the appointment of Gen. Elazar as chief of staff in January 1972, the matter was raised again. But while he favoured the system of fortifications, a form of compromise emerged. As the period of cease-fire continued, it assumed a very concrete form and its implementation was helped both psychologically and in fact by a complete absence of hostile activity along the Canal. This inactivity tended to quieten any reservations there may have been about the reduction in the number of fortifications and troops along the Canal. It accorded with a growing feeling of security and public expressions about the excessive burden being caused by the defence budget and the necessity to look for savings. The standard of infantry in the fortifications was reduced. Wherever there was a group of fortifications, only one remained active with a minimum number of soldiers manning it (two officers, twelve fighting men and the remainder administrative for a total of twenty per fortification). Of twenty-six fortifications, some ten were closed and blocked by sand in such a manner as to require a number of weeks to activate them again; two to three men were sent by day to these abandoned fortifications in a half-track so that the Egyptians would gain the impression that they were still being manned (Egyptian soldiers would frequently stand on the other side of the Canal gesticulating mockingly and pointing at their watches to indicate that it was 6 o'clock in the evening and time for the Israelis to go home to their main fortifications). Thus, because of the compromise which no military concept could accept, the dividing line between the Bar-Lev line acting as a warning system or as a defensive system designed to block the enemy gradually became hazy and clouded. This lack of clarity was to exact its cost in the first hours of the fighting along the Canal.

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In Search of Solutions

THE VERY MAGNITUDE and decisiveness of the Arab defeat in June 1967, with its implications to Arab pride, self-respect and honour (the importance and significance of which had never been adequately appreciated by Israeli leaders), created the inevitability of the next war. Furthermore, Nasser's resolve that 'what was taken by force, must be returned by force', was strengthened by Soviet undertakings to rebuild his forces and to make all the necessary support available to achieve this. Immediately after the 1967 war therefore he began to study with intense application the reasons for the Israeli success. In the euphoria of victory in Israel, all the divisional commanders had broadcast descriptions of their individual victories in battle. Nasser had all these broadcasts recorded. He closed himself in a room and played them back for days on end in order to try to appreciate what were the major elements that had contributed towards making the Israeli Army such an effective striking force. The Israeli military leadership – effusive as never before – left few details untold, providing anybody who was willing to sit down and study considerable food for thought.

With the aid of the Soviet Union, Nasser commenced to rebuild the Egyptian Army. This time however the reconstruction was not limited to equipment; much thought was also given to the quality of manpower and the motivation of the troops. And indeed in 1973 the Israelis were to note the marked change in the quality of the Egyptian officers and the regular army personnel – the result of a well-conceived plan to raise the standard of the Egyptian forces and to

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cease treating them as so much cannon fodder. For this purpose university graduates who had concluded their studies in a variety of subjects, such as engineering, agronomy and teaching, were mobilized, sent to officers' courses and kept in the army for an unspecified period of time, on the understanding that they would remain in service 'until the battle'. Many of the prisoners taken by Israel in the Yom Kippur War were highly qualified academicians who had not been allowed to pursue their professions, and had been mobilized and sent to an officers' course. The Egyptians who were thus mobilized accepted their fate, since the ultimate purpose of their mobilization – the liberation of Sinai – was explained to them as an act of patriotism, although many of them never believed that there would be 'battle'. Many of their senior officers proved to be young men in their middle thirties in the rank of colonel. Israeli officers who came into contact with Egyptian prisoners noted that the intellectual standard of the regular officer trained and educated in the regular army was superior to that of the university graduate who had been conscripted.

A most intensive political educational programme was undertaken in the Egyptian Army. Officers were encouraged to study Hebrew and learn about the adversary; every lesson that could be learnt from the Six Day War was studied, bringing about a radical change in the approach of the Egyptian forces. A monthly in Hebrew was published by Egyptian Military Intelligence giving a summary of events in Israel, teaching Hebrew for beginners, describing (for example) Israeli activities on the African continent or the history of the Israeli Air Force, and in general introducing the Egyptian soldier to the Israeli scene. The army's department for moral guidance produced a constant stream of material on the Israeli–Arab conflict, with at times marked anti-Semitic overtones.

Following the Six Day War, Nasser announced his plan to renew the fight to avenge the Egyptian defeat and to recover the lost territories, a decision that was possible only because of the Soviet Union. On 11 June 1967, as Nasser later described, the leaders of the Kremlin had cabled urging him not to give in, promising him all the support necessary in order to regain the territories that Israel had conquered. The Soviet Union, a major element in bringing on the 1967 war, was now ready to step in, make the best of a bad deal and take advantage of the Arab collapse. Weeks later towards the end of June a Soviet mission arrived in Egypt headed by the president of the Soviet Union, Nikolai Podgorny, and the Soviet chief of staff, Marshal Zakharov. The purpose of this mission was to examine the problems caused to Egypt by the war and to plan the reconstruction of the Egyptian forces. At this meeting President Nasser formally asked the Soviet Union to undertake full responsibility for the air defence of Egypt, suggesting that this defence be placed under a Soviet

commander (Egypt's Air Force had been destroyed in the war, hence the urgency of the problem as the Egyptian leaders saw it). Although President Podgorny agreed to the Egyptian proposal at the time, that evening he informed Nasser that the Soviet Union could not accept responsibility for the air defence of Egypt, even under command of a Soviet general. Sadat, whom Nasser had informed about this decision by telephone, suspected at the time that the reason for the Soviet refusal was the Glasboro summit meeting, which had taken place that very day in the United States, between Premier Kosygin and President Lyndon Johnson. Later Sadat went to Moscow to renew the request, but it was turned down.

Despite their refusal to assume responsibility for the air defence of Egypt, the Soviet Union agreed to reconstruct and re-equip the Egyptian armed forces. This was effected in record time: within half a year an Egyptian Army of approximately the same size as the one that had faced Israel on the morning of 5 June was facing Israel again across the Suez Canal. This rapid resurgence was but the initiation of a process which was to create in Egypt an army ultimately numbering some 800,000 troops. As soon as adequate equipment had been received, the Egyptians commenced limited harassing operations in 1968 which later culminated in the declaration of the War of Attrition.

On 21 January 1969, in an interview published in *Al Ahram*, President Nasser stated Egypt's military policy. He was quoted as saying

> The first priority, the absolute priority in this battle, is the military front, for we must realise that the enemy will not withdraw unless we force him to withdraw through fighting. Indeed there can be no hope of any political solution unless the enemy realises that we are capable of forcing him to withdraw through fighting.

The thinking of the political and military leadership of Egypt was clarified even further two months later in an article published in *Al Ahram* on 7 March 1969 by Mohammed Hassenein Heikal, the editor of *Al Ahram* and a writer who very frequently reflected in his writing the thinking of President Nasser and later for a period of President Sadat. In this article Heikal made it clear that since the ***Blitzkrieg***-type of war suited Israel because of its territory, its limited population, its state of preparedness, its standard of training and its limited resources, the Arabs must plan for a protracted war which would take into consideration their own depth in territory, their lack of sufficient preparedness, their unlimited economy and their unlimited population in which the loss of 15,000 troops would go unremarked whereas the loss of 10,000 troops by Israel would force it to ask for a cease-fire. He concluded that the future war with Israel must last from seven to eight weeks, because however much

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territory Israel occupied initially it would lose a war which lasted that long. Furthermore, he elaborated on the importance of the establishment of the eastern front, thus obliging Israel to face a war on two fronts.

In December 1969 American Secretary of State Mr William Rogers proposed the so-called Rogers Plan. This plan envisaged a peace treaty between Israel, Egypt and Jordan in which there would be an almost complete Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, leaving open the questions of the Gaza Strip and Sharm el-Sheikh. While Israel was not happy with this proposal, President Nasser turned it down; the Soviet attitude to the plan, which they seemed to favour at the outset, was ambivalent. In the meantime, various proposals were being bandied about between the Israelis and the Egyptians: in May 1970 Mrs Meir, the prime minister of Israel, indicated that for true peace Israel would make concessions that might 'surprise the world'; furthermore, Israel would be willing to negotiate not only directly but through an intermediary. Nasser indicated in return that if the Israelis were to withdraw, Egypt would recognize the State of Israel. Against this background came the second Rogers Plan, which aimed at a cease-fire leading to a renewal of negotiations in which Egypt would recognize Israeli sovereignty while Israel would withdraw from occupied territories.

Nasser's reaction was at first a negative one. It is very important when considering the political developments at this stage not to lose sight of the fact that they were taking place against the background of a stepped-up War of Attrition in which both sides were sustaining heavy casualties. There is no doubt but that in the final analysis the severity of the War of Attrition was having its effect on the political decisions on both sides. President Nasser went to Moscow on 29 June 1970 and stayed until 17 July. (He was by now a very sick man and had gone to the Soviet Union for medical treatment as well as political discussions.) This Moscow visit was to have a profound effect ultimately on Soviet–Egyptian relations. According to President Sadat, in an interview published in *Al Hawadess* in Beirut on 26 April 1974, in an atmosphere of prevarication in Moscow Nasser decided in a fit of frustration, when he was seated in the conference room at the Kremlin facing the leaders of the Soviet Union, to reverse his decision and to accept the Rogers Plan.

Six months earlier during his visit to the Soviet Union in January 1970, following the Israeli bombing in depth, the Soviets had agreed to take over responsibility for the air defence of Egypt. They had furthermore acceded to the insistent demands of the Egyptians to supply them with aircraft capable of carrying out deep-penetration bombing missions in Israel; such a force they argued would in itself constitute a deterrent against Israeli bombing raids into Egypt. The Egyptians awaited the planes in addition to a Soviet-manned

surface-to-air SAM missile system, but while the missiles and the crews had arrived the planes had not. Nasser had become very impatient, and, conforming to his normal practice of trying to play one side off against the other, had in his May Day speech in 1970 made overtures to President Nixon indicating a tendency to moderation. After his June visit he returned to Egypt a frustrated man. Although as a result of his treatment in the Soviet Union he looked as if he had lost twenty years, yet he was a very sick man. Sadat described how he met him at the airport, asking him what he had concluded with the Soviets. Nasser answered simply in two words, spoken in English: 'Hopeless case.' Later he added, 'I have accepted the Rogers proposals.'

Nasser saw in his success in convincing the Soviet Union to involve itself militarily in the defence of Egypt in January 1970 a tremendous step forward of very great importance and significance. But at his subsequent meeting in Moscow in June 1970 he suddenly realized that while the Soviets had sent forces to the Middle East to defend Egypt, they were not prepared to force Israel to accept an imposed solution by military means. He therefore decided that the only way to reach a solution satisfactory to Egypt would be through the Americans. In fact when Joseph Sisco, the United States assistant secretary of state, had come to Cairo in April, the first contact of a practical nature had been arranged with them. In spite of this, however, he had decided to see what he could get from the Soviets. But dissatisfied with his June visit, during the flight home he considered a political plan of action that could be developed through the Americans. He now proceeded to try to mend his fences with them.

On 28 September 1970 President Nasser died. Soviet Premier Kosygin, attended by a large entourage, rushed to Cairo and spent almost a week there in an endeavour to influence the direction of the new regime in Egypt and to strengthen the position of the group around Ali Sabri, a pro-Soviet vice-president. Another less prominent visitor at Nasser's funeral was Mr Elliot Richardson, American secretary of health, education and welfare, who quietly met President Sadat. This was to be the first of a series of American contacts with President Sadat.

Towards the end of 1970, Israeli Minister of Defence Gen. Dayan put forward a suggestion for an interim solution of the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. Israel would withdraw for a comparatively short distance from the Suez Canal, enabling the Egyptians to reopen it and permitting Egyptian civilian personnel necessary for its operation on to the east bank. Dayan reasoned that by opening the Canal a vested interest would be created for both the Egyptians and the Soviets to ensure that it would remain open. Furthermore, he believed that the demilitarization of the area on the east bank of the Canal would create a buffer area not only between the Israeli and the Egyptian forces, but also – of far

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greater importance – between the Israeli and Soviet forces. Contacts between President Sadat and the Americans had been developing throughout these discussions; Sadat was communicating with President Nixon and an Egyptian representative went to Washington in order to develop the idea of a partial settlement along the Canal.

Early in 1971 Sadat gave an interview to Arnaud de Borchgrave, an editor of *Newsweek*, who had become very close to him and who was to prove ultimately to be an invaluable source to Sadat's thinking. In the interview he said for the first time that he would be prepared to recognize Israel and live in peace with it. With this interview in hand de Borchgrave flew to Jerusalem and met a number of people who were impressed by this new development. He was received by Prime Minister Mrs Golda Meir and related to her the details of his interview with Sadat. Mrs Meir listened with ill-concealed impatience and stopped him in the middle saying, 'If I am not mistaken you have come to interview me, so please pose your questions.' At the end of the interview de Borchgrave said, 'Madame Prime Minister, I fear that your remarks will be out of date when they are published, because in the meantime Sadat will respond to an overture by Ambassador Jarring and will announce that he is prepared to make peace.' At that point Mrs Meir reacted sarcastically, 'That will be the day. I don't believe it will happen.' De Borchgrave flew back to New York via Zurich. At Zurich airport he was paged and called to the telephone: it was the *Newsweek* representative, relaying a request from Jerusalem that the text of the interview with Golda Meir be returned for amendment, because in the meantime Sadat had made the declaration which de Borchgrave had forecast. The fact that Mrs Meir did not amend the text, but merely brought it up to date, confirmed de Borchgrave's opinion that Mrs Meir here missed the greatest opportunity to prevent war.

On 4 February 1971 Sadat announced his proposal for a partial settlement. It had many points similar to those in Dayan's proposal but diverged on the nature of the Egyptian forces, police or military, which would be allowed to cross to the east bank. Another area of divergence was on the main issue of whether, as the Israelis maintained, the settlement would be an agreement in itself without prejudice to further negotiations for a final agreement, or, as the Egyptians maintained, it would be part of the final settlement including an advance undertaking on Israel's part for the total withdrawal of its forces from Sinai. No progress was made because of the Egyptian insistence that the Israelis undertake in advance to withdraw completely from Sinai. The next move came from Dr Gunnar Jarring, the UN Secretary General's representative, who was appointed to implement Security Council Resolution 242. He produced a proposal of his own which was very close to extreme Egyptian demands, but completely unacceptable to Israel. Following his intervention the Israeli position hardened.

For many months during 1971 negotiations continued on the issue of partial settlement but no advance was made. It is a sobering reflection on the relation of personalities to the creation of history to realize that a more able and decisive negotiator than Dr Jarring could well have achieved a breakthrough in 1971. For in the final analysis, after the 1973 war in the agreement on the disengagement of forces Egypt did agree to much of what Israel had proposed in 1971.

On 1 March 1971 President Sadat made the first of a number of secret visits to Moscow. He was accompanied by Sharawi Guma, the minister of interior, and Gen. Mahmoud Fawzi, the minister of war. Sadat was new and uncertain of himself and the two ministers accompanying him held much of the power of Egypt in their hands, especially the former who controlled the security services. During the visit Sadat raised the question of the long-range planes which had been promised to Nasser, the non-delivery of which had caused him to agree to the Rogers Plan. To Sadat's request came the reply, 'We are prepared to supply these planes to you on condition that they will not be used without prior approval from Moscow.' According to his report of the meeting, Sadat was horrified. A very sharp exchange took place. The true implications of Soviet military involvement were becoming apparent to him; and a completely new process of thought began at this point in his mind, which was to lead him to request the withdrawal of the Soviet advisers and forces from Egypt in July 1972. On his return to Egypt Sadat convened the Supreme Council of the Arab Socialist Union and recounted the story of his negotiations in Moscow, saying, 'I refused to accept the planes under such conditions because I refused to accept a situation whereby there exists on Egyptian soil a will other than that of myself and the political leadership of Egypt.'

In May 1971 American Secretary of State Rogers, accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State Sisco, came to Cairo in order to endeavour to advance the negotiations for a partial settlement (during this visit Secretary Rogers announced that he had no additional request from Egypt following Sadat's announcement in February 1971). At this meeting Sadat apparently hinted to his American visitors that certain changes might occur in Egypt, and indeed a week later, on 14 May, he eliminated his opposition, composed of the men of Nasser's inner circle, including Ali Sabri, who led the pro-Soviet elements in the leadership. This group had chosen Anwar Sadat to be president after Nasser because they considered him to be a mediocrity, an easily pliable front man who would do as they bid. As the months went on they discovered that he was not at all easy to direct and had his own views on matters of external and internal policy. Accordingly they prepared a characteristically Middle

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Eastern plot to take power and overthrow him. Sadat, who kept himself well informed of the plotters' intentions, struck first. They were all arrested and subsequently brought to trial and sentenced to long prison terms.

In the Kremlin these events were viewed with considerable alarm. For the first time in years an American secretary of state had visited Cairo and now came this blow, involving as it did Ali Sabri, one of the staunch supporters of Soviet military involvement in the Middle East and in Egypt. President Podgorny was dispatched post-haste to Cairo and on arrival produced the text of the Soviet–Egyptian fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation. This treaty pledged Soviet support for Egypt in its struggle to become a socialist society; each of the two parties undertook not to enter in alliance or to take any action directed against the other party or to conclude any other international agreement at variance with the terms of the treaty. In their meeting with Sadat, Rogers and Sisco had implied that the United States would be prepared to do a deal at Israel's expense in return for the Egyptians doing a deal at the Soviet Union's expense. Suddenly, out of the blue, came the Soviet–Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation to dampen the hopes of the Americans. They asked Sadat for an explanation; his reply was that Egypt was free to make its own decisions.

When the third phase of the cease-fire that had commenced on 7 August 1970 came to an end in March 1971, Sadat did not renew it as he had done twice before. For, as President Sadat announced, 1971 was to be a 'Year of Decision'.

On 6 July an additional American representative in the form of the chief of the Egyptian desk at the State Department, Mr Michael Sterner, arrived in Egypt. According to a subsequent interview given to Arnaud de Borchgrave of *Newsweek* (in which Sadat's account of the negotiations between the United States and Egypt during 1971 was given in great detail), Sterner informed Sadat that President Nixon had now decided to take an active role in the Middle East crisis, although he wanted to know first if the Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between Egypt and the Soviet Union had changed anything in the Egyptian position. Replying that the treaty had not changed anything because it was only a new frame for already existing relations, Sadat agreed to restore diplomatic relations with the United States after the first phase of an Israeli withdrawal within the framework of a partial agreement, advising Sterner that he intended to send Soviet personnel home at the end of phase one of such a withdrawal 'because I am just as keen on that as you are'.

Since nothing happened for several months, although Sisco was sent to Israel, Sadat came to the conclusion that his American approach was not paying off, so, accordingly, on 11 October 1971 he flew to Moscow for talks with the three Soviet leaders. At this meeting he managed to clear the

atmosphere and at Egypt's request an arms deal was agreed on. The arms were to be delivered by the end of 1971 so that a 'decision in regard to the battle', as Sadat put it, could be made. The Egyptians were expecting deliveries of arms to start in October, but by mid-December nothing had arrived (on 8 December 1971 the India–Pakistan War had broken out and the Soviet Union found itself called upon to meet its obligations to India). Sadat notified the Soviet Union of his desire to sort the matter out by arranging immediate talks in Moscow; to his chagrin the Soviets invited him to come not in January but in February 1972.

Sadat's February visit was inconclusive; two months later, in April, he was invited again for discussions before President Nixon's planned summit visit to Moscow in May 1972. For the Soviet Union the situation was a delicate one. Here they were on the one hand developing a posture of détente with the United States, and on the other being pressured by Egypt to take action that was basically irreconcilable with it. At the meeting Sadat maintained that there could be no break in the log jam in the Middle East without military action although he could see that the Soviet Union was opposed to this. Nevertheless the Soviet leaders did agree that Israel had to be made aware of Egypt's strength and promised arms for this purpose. They assured Sadat that after the conclusion of the Brezhnev–Nixon talks in May they would embark on a major programme for the strengthening of Egypt's military potential. Both sides were of the opinion that since 1972 was presidential election year in the United States, and there would be no change in United States policy before the elections in November, Egypt must be ready to go to war immediately afterwards. To this, according to Sadat, the Soviets agreed.

The announcement coming out of the Nixon–Brezhnev summit meeting in Moscow referred to a mutual agreement to achieve 'a military relaxation' in the Middle East to be followed by a freezing of the situation. This to Sadat meant that Israel would be in a position of military supremacy. Furthermore, it was this reference to a military relaxation coupled with the Soviet failure to implement any of the points agreed upon at the April meeting in preparation for the coming war that prompted his decision to ask the Soviet Government to remove its forces and advisers from Egypt in July 1972. He had come to the conclusion that he could not go to war with the Soviet advisers present in Egypt and while the Soviet Government played about with him as it had done for the past year.

This move on the part of Sadat coincided with the dissatisfaction felt with the Soviet advisers in the Egyptian Army, in whose ranks pressure had mounted to dispense with their services. Their crude, gauche behaviour had created bitter antagonism. They were aloof, looking down on the Egyptian officers and treating them with faintly concealed disdain. Their whole system and

outlook was irreconcilable with that of an easy-going and friendly people, the levantine merchants and the traders of the *souks*. Matters were not helped by the fact that in every battalion, brigade and missile battery there sat a Soviet adviser who submitted reports on its Egyptian commander. One can go as far as to say that the Egyptian officers hated them, for even their religion was a frequent subject of mockery. Egyptian prisoners related after the war how in one brigade during a discussion in which many of the Egyptian officers criticized Soviet weapons the Soviet adviser lost his temper and said, 'If so, may Allah give you better weapons.' There was an uproar and a call for a strike. The matter reached the army commander and the adviser was replaced. The bitterness aroused among the Egyptians by the Soviet behaviour was given vivid expression in a series of articles by Mohammed Hassenein Heikal describing the reasons for the break with the Soviets. They did not appreciate, he pointed out, that in dealing with Egypt they were dealing not with some second-rate nation but with a people who had once led civilization and the world.

Sadat's move against the Soviets, while arousing the apprehensions of those elements in Egypt which favoured their presence, was received with unreserved acclamation in the Egyptian Army. It was received with satisfaction too in Israel, although Sadat's purpose was completely misunderstood. The various Israeli announcements were of relief and gratification at the removal of the Soviets from this front with Israel. Not appreciating the true reason for Sadat's move, motives which were far removed from the true one were read into it, a fact that contributed in no small measure to the strengthening of the 'concept' which played such a vital part in misleading Israel.

The central guiding line of Sadat's policy remained the direct involvement of the Americans in the Middle East dispute. At no point did he depart from this, although he was by now becoming gradually convinced that without military action he would not be able to set in motion effective political moves in co-operation with the United States. He was however unwilling to bring about a complete split with the Soviet Union. He envisaged ridding himself of Soviet influence only so far as decision making and a growing Soviet tendency to interfere in Egyptian policy were concerned. He wanted freedom to take any steps he wished to take, including war, in the future; and such action would be dependent upon maintaining an ongoing practical relationship with the Soviet Union. Without a continuation of the massive Soviet arms deliveries, his plans would not be very effective.

Accordingly, in October 1972, President Assad of Syria went to Moscow and endeavoured to mediate between Egypt and the Soviet Union; shortly afterwards he was followed by Premier Aziz Sidki of Egypt, who apparently

succeeded in convincing the Soviet leaders that there was no intention on the part of the Egyptians to rush into the arms of the United States in order to prejudice the position of the Soviet Union. They agreed to arrest the process of deterioration in the relationship between the two countries, and soon after Soviet military officers returned to Egypt. (These were in addition to those advisers and instructors who had remained after July 1972.) The Soviets had constructed an impressive war machine in Egypt and had obviously no intention of abandoning it; instead they were adapting themselves to the new situation in a characteristically pragmatic manner.

Throughout this period Sadat's personal position was becoming weaker and weaker. He had become a laughing stock in his own country with the passing of 1971, the 'Year of Decision' in which no decision was made. His specious excuses about the India–Pakistan War and other explanations for his failure to go to war were the subject of much biting humour among the wits of Cairo. His image was that of a foolish man and he headed a hesitant Egyptian society which was to a great degree demoralized and in which the credibility of the government was very low. The impression gained abroad was of a regime desperately preoccupied in an endeavour to survive from month to month. Political observers were closely examining these developments in order to evaluate what personality might emerge as an alternative to Sadat – the feeling was that he was remaining in power *faute de mieux* and the question was how long the Egyptian economy could bear a very heavy military burden and the strains of a 'no peace, no war situation'.

By agreement, renewable in March 1973 at the conclusion of five years, the Soviet Union enjoyed certain facilities for its Mediterranean fleet in Egyptian ports. The importance of these facilities, supported by an infrastructure capable of handling Soviet ships and repairing them, is obvious in the context of the growth of Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean over the past decade. In December 1972, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement, both sides were obliged to renegotiate. Gen. Ahmed Ismail, the new Egyptian minister of war, approached the Soviet military authorities in the embassy in Cairo and advised them that Egypt intended to renew this agreement. Shortly after, at the beginning of 1973, he visited the Soviet Union as did Hafez Ismail, Sadat's adviser. These visits proved to be successful from the Egyptian point of view with the Soviet Union agreeing to the Egyptian requests for the supply of arms. The Soviets had decided to make the best of the situation and to make available the technology which the Egyptians were seeking. Immediately after Ismail's return to Egypt the material began to flow.

At the beginning of 1973 the United States Government entered into negotiations with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for the supply to

their air forces of Phantom fighter bombers; it was an event which passed comparatively unnoticed but which doubtless must be taken into consideration as one of the elements leading to the escalation in the area. The fact that for the first time the Americans indicated a preparedness to supply highly advanced technological equipment to Arab states, in addition to the Israelis, created a suspicion in the Soviet Union that the Americans were entering into a race in that specific field in which the Soviets considered that they had gained the upper hand and had bound many of the Arab states to them. Indeed it seems that the American negotiations with the Arabs had a certain amount of influence on the Soviet Union's own readiness to escalate and to supply equipment that had never been supplied to any country outside the Soviet Union.

For years the Egyptian leadership had lived with an obsession about Israeli air superiority, which had been brought home in the most dramatic manner in the 1967 war and which had been emphasized to an extreme degree by the deep-penetration Israeli raids in January 1970. The Egyptian military planners had all along maintained that until the Egyptian Air Force was supplied with advanced, medium-range bombers or fighter bombers such as the MIG 23, the Phantom, the Jaguar or the Mirage, which could endanger the Israeli centres of population and above all could deal with Israeli airfields, they could not embark on war. This was known in Israel and was the basis of an Israeli intelligence estimation that the Egyptians would not achieve this prerequisite until 1975, hence it was believed that war was improbable before then: the Egyptians would not be content without a bomber force adequate to deal simultaneously with all Israeli airfields. Sadat however appreciated that he could not wait until this necessary force was built up by 1975: it was doubtful from an internal point of view whether he could remain in power that long without making any move. His insistent demands on the Soviets had been for the supply of either attack planes of the type of MIG 23, which included some of the most modern Soviet technology and which in the event of war the Soviet Union feared might fall into the hands of Israel and of the West, or alternatively of medium-range surface-to-surface missiles which by their very existence on Egyptian soil could deter Israel from embarking on any bombing in depth. Gen. Ahmed Ismail's visit to Moscow in early 1973 was the turning point.

In March 1973, following the visit of a very high-level Soviet military delegation to Cairo, the Soviet Union began to ship the Scud Battlefield Support Surface-to-Surface Missile to the Egyptian Army. This missile, capable of carrying either a high-explosive warhead or a nuclear warhead, has a range of some 180 miles enabling it to engage centres of population in Israel from Egypt – the main requirement of the Egyptians before they could go

to war had now been met by the Soviet Union. Sadat believed that with this deterrent in his hands he could replace the deterrent that would have been created by a medium-range bomber force and he is on record as saying that his final decision to go to war was made in April 1973 – when the first Scud missiles arrived on Egyptian soil – but in truth the final decision which led to war was made in the Kremlin by those who decided to supply the Scud to the Egyptians.

Parallel to these activities, in March 1973 (after the inauguration of President Nixon), Sadat sent Hafez Ismail, his adviser on security affairs, to Washington. The purpose of his visit was to influence the Americans to bring pressure to bear on the Israelis. Nixon, whom Ismail met, allegedly stated that he was willing to influence Israel in return for Egyptian concessions which went beyond the Rogers Plan. In view of this, Sadat reached the conclusion that there was no alternative but to go to war in order to break the stalemate. As Heikal was to explain in an interview in *Der Speigel* after the war, nobody attributed sufficient importance to the failure of Ismail's mission in Washington. There is no doubt that it played an important part in subsequent decisions.

Later that month Sadat announced that he was taking over the premiership in addition to the presidency for the purpose of preparing Egypt for total confrontation with Israel. On 9 April he gave an interview to Arnaud de Borchgrave in which he complained that during his meeting with Hafez Ismail President Nixon had refused to exert pressure on Israel and had asked for a declaration about the legitimate position of the Israeli case and for the demilitarization of Sinai.

> You Americans always use computers to solve geopolitical equations and they always mislead you. You simply forget to feed (Egyptian) psychology into the computer. Now the time has come for a decision . . . the time has come for a shock. Diplomacy will continue before, during and after the battle . . . . . everything in this country is now being mobilized in earnest for the resumption of the battle – which is now inevitable . . . . . the Russians are providing us now with everything that is possible for them to supply and I am now quite satisfied.

Armed with his interview de Borchgrave returned to Washington. And although he related his story to many figures in the Senate and House of Representatives and in the State Department, nobody was prepared to believe him. All were of the opinion that Sadat was bluffing. All except Dr Henry Kissinger who, according to de Borchgrave, was the only person in Washington who believed the story and who reacted seriously to Sadat's intentions. Kissinger's reaction was, 'I too expect something to happen which can be very serious', and he went on to express the opinion that in the coming war in the

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Middle East oil would be a weapon. Following these two meetings with Sadat and Kissinger, de Borchgrave published his by now historic article.

Seldom has a leader of a country bent on war enunciated so clearly his intentions to the world and to all parties concerned. But while note was taken of his remarks in Israeli intelligence circles, their evaluations continued to be coloured by the assumption that Sadat could not put his threats into action until the Egyptians had solved the problem of the bomber attack force which they required. Israeli intelligence continued to maintain that this was typical of Sadat's brinkmanship; he would not go over the brink.

Perhaps Sadat's greatest success was his achievement in the Arab world. He was attacked, reviled, publicly mocked, laughed at because of the 'Year of Decision', yet he never reacted and did not quarrel with a single Arab leader. He succeeded in not being encumbered with the suspicions of his Arab brothers, a situation which surrounded Nasser all through his life. He developed relations with King Feisal of Saudi Arabia, placing the emphasis on tradition, religion and Islam, and at the same time played along with Col. Ghadafi of Libya and his idiosyncrasies. When Ghadafi offered him union, Sadat turned to King Feisal and asked him what to do: should he fall into the arms of Ghadafi, an unstable lunatic preaching against every traditional regime in the Middle East? Feisal's reaction was to draw Egypt closer and develop collaboration between their two countries.

For six years, during which attempts were made in the Arab world to mobilize the oil weapon, King Feisal maintained that war with Israel was one matter and exploiting oil as a weapon was another. Gradually however an international psychosis was built up around the problem of oil, a development that tied in with the growing financial wealth in the oil-producing states which if necessary could forgo part of the vast sums being paid as royalties, especially since more money could be received for less oil. Saudi Arabian policy was reviewed in May 1973 and gradually the coalition between Egypt and Saudi Arabia to wield the oil weapon was forged. In the course of their discussions, Sadat convinced Feisal that without the unifying force of a war it would not be possible to develop the oil weapon; and in order to create the oil weapon to further the Arab war aims, it was essential first to go to war. Feisal took along with him in this move Kuwait and the oil sheikdoms in the Persian Gulf. Israeli intelligence observed this new change in policy, but failed to link it with the military developments in the area.

In the same month, May, the Egyptian foreign minister visited Moscow. A communiqué published at the conclusion of his visit pledged Soviet support for Egyptian efforts 'to liquidate the consequences of aggression'. The possibility of military action was not ruled out. A month later however the second

summit conference between President Nixon and Mr Brezhnev took place. Sadat saw the decisions taken at this conference as reflecting a desire to put the Middle East problem on ice and to incline towards a military relaxation. Nevertheless, while the summit meeting, entirely devoted towards the cause of détente, was taking place, a massive infusion of Soviet missilery and weapons into Egypt, and a crash programme to supply the Syrians with the surface-to-air missile system which they required prior to embarking on a war, was under way.

At least twice before this point, Egyptian planning for an attack on Israeli forces had been well advanced and ready for implementation. At the end of 1971 a bombing attack by fifty bombers on Sharm el-Sheikh was planned. But the India–Pakistan War broke out, so Sadat cancelled the operation on the assumption that nobody in the world would pay much attention to a war in the Middle East while a major struggle was going on in Asia. The second action was planned for October 1972. Sadat ordered his then war minister, Gen. Mohammed Sadeq, to drop a parachute brigade in the Sinai and hold a beachhead for a week to ten days. During that time the United Nations Security Council was to be called into session, Libya was to shut off oil supplies, and pressure was to be brought to bear on Washington to force Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories. But Gen. Sadeq objected to this operation, being unwilling to sacrifice picked troops who would certainly have been wiped out by the Israel Defence Forces. He maintained that the Egyptian home front was not ready for war and that far more comprehensive preparations for the defence of Egypt had to be undertaken before going to war.

Two months later Sadat dismissed Sadeq, a popular general in Egypt and the prime mover for ousting the Soviet advisers. According to de Borchgrave, Sadat was aware of the fact that he might not survive another defeat at the hands of the Israelis and yet he had become convinced that Egypt had little to lose by the resumption of fighting. He reasoned that should Egypt suffer a disaster, it would be a loss similar to the Vietnamese Communists' setback during the offensives of 1968 and 1972 – a military defeat but a psychological victory.

Gen. Ahmed Ismail was appointed as Sadeq's successor with instructions to prepare for war. He had taken command of the Suez front in July 1967 after the débâcle and was therefore familiar with the military problems posed by this front. He was opposed to a renewal of the War of Attrition, because it was quite obvious that Israel would not allow the Arabs to dictate the field of battle and that the Israeli reaction this time would be far greater than before. After considering a number of other possibilities, he came to the conclusion

that the initial Egyptian attack must be a massive one – indeed it must be the most massive blow that the Egyptians could mount. Within a few months he was appointed commander in chief of the Arab Federation, comprising nominally Egypt, Syria and Libya, which in fact meant that he would co-ordinate the Egyptian and Syrian forces.

In analysing the problems facing him, Gen. Ismail realized that Israel had four advantages: air superiority, technological ability, a high standard of training and what he considered to be guaranteed supplies from the United States. Against this he considered that Israel suffered from a number of basic disadvantages: long lines of communication leading to a number of fronts, an inability to suffer heavy casualties because of its small population or to fight a long war because of a basic economic weakness; coupled with these were the disadvantages arising out of over-confidence and a superiority complex.

The Arabs had studied in great detail the lessons of 1967 and had analysed every point of Israeli superiority in order to produce an answer. The first conclusion they reached was that it had been a mistake to bring the Israelis to deliver the first strike in 1967; they would do it themselves in 1973. The scope and the intensity of the Israeli attack in 1967 has surprised them. This time they would throw everything they had into the initial attack. In 1967 they had failed to wage a simultaneous multi-front war, thus enabling Israel to deal with the various elements in the war at its leisure; this time they would co-ordinate the major Egyptian and Syrian offensives and use the other Arab forces, including Jordan, as a reserve. Obviously the first and foremost consideration was the supply of all the weapons necessary for the war; this was assured during Gen. Ismail's visit to Moscow and the visit of a high-level Soviet delegation to Cairo early in 1973.

Co-ordination with the Syrians began in February 1973 with Ismail's visit. For three months the Syrian front had been erupting in a series of heavy military engagements following the Israeli reactions to Palestinian terrorist activities from across the Syrian and Lebanese borders. The Israeli reaction was intense and massive. Suddenly, following an Israeli operation in January 1973, the front became quiet. There was not even a Palestinian terrorist reaction. The Israelis saw this development as one which must increase the prevailing feeling of confidence, for it was obvious to them that as a result of their activity the Syrians had been taken out of the war; in fact the motive for the quiet along the border was the Syrian preparation for war.

Meanwhile, Gen. Ismail had made a decision in principle that the Egyptian attack, when it came, would be launched along the entire front of the Suez Canal, a distance of 110 miles. Such a plan would not give the Israelis any indication as to the main thrust of the attacking forces and consequently would

prevent them from concentrating against it and delay their counter-attack while they looked for the main thrust. It would furthermore answer the problem posed by Israeli air superiority, forcing them to dissipate their air power along a very wide front.

In January 1973 the Arab Defence Council worked out an overall unified plan for military and political action against Israel. In the same month President Sadat visited President Tito. (After the war the Yugoslavs explained that the overflying rights which they had granted the Soviets during the war were due to the urgings of President Sadat and not of the Soviet Union.) In February Sadat ordered a report recommending the most suitable days for the crossing of the Canal. Director of Operations Gen. Gamasy presented the report to him in handwriting, recommending three groups of days: in the second half of May, in the month of September and in the month of October.

Soon after the failure of Hafez Ismail's mission in Washington in March 1973 Minister of War Ahmed Ismail visited Damascus. Sadat now made his final decision to go to war, planning it for May of that year. (Already in January he had instructed the Egyptian chief of staff, Gen. Shazli, to plan the crossing of the Canal and to prepare other operational plans.) However in May he gave orders to postpone the attack until October. Explaining the postponement later he said:

> I planned in fact to launch the operation in May, but then the Russians set the date for the Second Summit Conference with Nixon in Washington for the month of May, and for political reasons which need not be revealed at this point I decided to postpone the date to the group of days in September or to the third group of days in October.

At that time, in May, considerable preparations for the crossing of the Canal had been made by the Egyptian Army. Israeli intelligence noted these preparations but maintained that Sadat, as was his wont, would go to the brink and then withdraw without launching a war. The Israeli chief of staff, Gen. Elazar, did not accept their evaluation of the situation and ordered a partial mobilization costing some $11 million. But the Egyptian attack did not materialize and Israeli intelligence, perhaps not specifically, declared, 'I told you so.' This vindication of their estimate in May would be a major factor in the mistaken Israeli evaluation in October.

The Egyptian war minister visited Damascus again on 8 May and frequent meetings of high-ranking Egyptian and Syrian leaders took place throughout the summer months. In June Sadat flew to Damascus for talks with Assad and by early September full details of military co-operation between the two countries had been worked out.

In the meantime feelers were thrown out to King Hussein of Jordan by the Egyptians, indicating a willingness for reconciliation. Hussein had been virtually ostracized by the rest of the Arab world following the civil war in Jordan in September 1970 and the fighting in July 1971, when the last pockets of Palestinian terrorists were wiped out. The situation was further complicated by the murder in Cairo of Wasfi Tel, the Jordanian prime minister and a close friend of King Hussein, by a group of Palestinian terrorists. Sadat did not prosecute the murderers, an omission which Hussein could not forgive. In March 1972 Hussein launched a plan for a federal Jordan, uniting Jordan with the West Bank after Israeli evacuation. This plan implied peace with Israel, and Egypt reacted by severing diplomatic relations with Jordan. It is therefore not surprising that the Egyptian feelers in early 1973 were eagerly seized upon by King Hussein (who was only too anxious to break out of his isolation in the Arab world) with the result that Jordanian envoys visited Cairo and Damascus during the summer months.

In August Sadat's personal representative, Hassan Sabri Al Khouli, visited Amman and was quoted on his return by Cairo Radio as stating that he had discussed 'the cause for which we work on all levels, namely the battle'. The appearance of Mustafa Tlas, the Syrian defence minister, in Amman on 29 August should have sounded the alarm in many places, especially in Israel, for Jordan's relations with Syria had been virtually non-existent and were at best strained and unfriendly.

On 12 September a meeting took place in Cairo between the leaders of the front-line states: Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Photographs were published of King Hussein and Presidents Sadat and Assad seated in friendly conversation. Diplomatic relations between Jordan and Egypt and Jordan and Syria were renewed, while the restoration of financial assistance from the oil states to Jordan was discussed. At this meeting Hussein was not let into the secret of the attack (he was to explain later that he had not been consulted before the outbreak of war) but was given a general indication that such an attack was planned, and that agreement with him was essential in order to guarantee the southern flank of the Syrian forces and so prevent Israel from striking at Syria through northern Jordan. His reaction was one of cautious hesitation, having regard to his unfortunate experience with his Arab allies in 1967, when he had been left in the lurch by them and as a result had lost half his kingdom. He was aware of the bitter hatred of the Palestinians towards him, but nevertheless he now released some of them from prison. It seems that in the light of all that has been published about Hussein's attitude during the war, his active intervention in the battle against Israeli territory was conditional on the prior conquest of the Golan Heights by the Syrians. As a second best and

in order to protect himself from Arab criticism, during the war he committed two armoured brigades to battle within the framework of the Syrian Army.

In August Sadat had held a meeting with Yasser Arafat and the heads of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Cairo. At this meeting he told them that he had decided to go to war, asking them what their part would be and suggesting that they supply him with forces to serve along the Canal. The Palestinian leadership did not take him very seriously. After all, for years he had been talking about an imminent war and nothing had happened. They returned to Beirut, where Sadat's announcement was discussed in a nine-hour emergency session of the Executive Committee of the PLO. The meeting was informed that Sadat's ultimate purpose was to generate United States pressure on Israel. Reports of Sadat's conversation with the Palestinians leaked out and were soon the subject of amused and sceptical comment in the cafés of Beirut. On 21 September a report of the meeting appeared in the leading Beirut newspaper, *Al Nahar*. But although it was picked up and circulated throughout the world by the Associated Press, nobody paid much attention to it.

Meanwhile, throughout the summer, the two main elements which were essential in the eyes of the Arab planners and their Soviet advisers in order to launch a war were being supplied by the Soviet Union. The Egyptian and Syrian armies had received surface-to-surface missiles capable of engaging Israeli civilian targets: in Syria the FROG missile was ready for action; in Egypt the Scud missile, together with Soviet crews, was in similar readiness. Furthermore, the surface-to-air missile system which in the Soviet view would neutralize Israeli air superiority along the front line – the main Arab obsession – was being rushed to Syria in a crash programme during the months of July and August. Along the front line and on the approaches to the capital cities the Israeli Air Force would be neutralized by a surface-to-air missile system which would act as an umbrella over the advancing Arab forces, while the surface-to-surface missiles poised against targets in the centre of Israel would deter the Israeli Air Force from deep-penetration bombing attacks.

The answer to the Israeli air threat, co-ordination with Saudi Arabia for the use of oil as a weapon, co-ordination with other Arab countries in order to ensure additional reinforcements, protection of Syria's southern Jordanian flank, continuing Soviet supplies and arrangements for political support were all carefully planned. Sadat's scheme was taking concrete shape. War was certain now.

18

Lessons and Implications

THE BASIC ERRORS of the Israelis in the Yom Kippur War grew, paradoxically enough, out of their victory in the Six Day War. It was never properly appreciated that in that war the Israel Defence Forces had attacked a comparatively hastily deployed Egyptian Army – with the result that the **Israeli commanders had emerged from it feeling that it was possible to accomplish everything with a tank and a plane and so built their armed forces in an unbalanced manner.**

The Egyptians realized that with the outbreak of another war their problem was how to neutralize the tank and the plane and how to slow down the process of growth of the IDF's reserve potential. Their reply was a missile umbrella, a concentrated mass of anti-tank weapons and strategic surprise which would force the IDF to react piecemeal. But the Israelis did not construct their forces as a reply to this concept; they ignored it, adopting a fixed concept of their own based on experience in the previous conflict. For instance, since the half-tracks in use during the Six Day War had been inadequate from the point of view of their desert and cross-country capabilities and could not keep up with the tank, the armoured personnel now tended to discard the infantry in their plans. As a result, **while infantry were an integral part of the Egyptian defensive system, Israeli armour stormed enemy positions without infantry and mortars, sometimes in wasteful battles.** The Israeli infantry lacked mobility, and its weapons – with a few exceptions – were no match for the Soviet equipment (its anti-tank capabilities had been drastically reduced because the basic assumption made in the IDF was that the best answer to tank is tank).

Furthermore, having suffered for years from Israeli superiority in night fighting, the Arab forces now exploited all the modern technological advances in this area in order to equip themselves. **Because Israeli thinking placed the emphasis on the tank and the plane, which are not ideal night-fighting weapons, the subject of night fighting – previously Israel's forte – was neglected, and with few exceptions Israel did little that was spectacular in night fighting in the war.** The absence of night-fighting equipment could be explained in part as being the result of a lack of budget. But this cannot explain away the lack of consciousness throughout the army about night fighting, and the inadequate use of Israel's superb paratroops and commandos to solve the problems that the armoured forces were called upon to solve. **A classic example was the failed attempt (in which heavy casualties were sustained) of the 7th Brigade to take Tel Shams in Syria by frontal armoured assault, while the same position was taken the next night by a parachute battalion with four wounded.**

The lessons of the war dictate the conversion of the ground forces into one large, interarm battle team controlled by one headquarters. There should be two types of team: armour being dominant in one, infantry in the other.

Again there was a failure to take into account available intelligence – such as that on the Sagger anti-tank missile – and apply its lessons organizationally and operationally. A more serious example of this failure was the fact that a more or less complete Egyptian plan of attack as it was ultimately carried out on 6 October was known to Israeli intelligence, but no conclusions seemed to have been drawn from this material planning-wise or operationally. Gen. Gonen, GOC Southern Command, was later to insist that he never knew about it.

Again, because the Israeli forces placed so much emphasis on the plane, the artillery arm was neglected. **Once it is assumed that close support is not available from the Air Force, increased reliance on artillery becomes self-evident.** But because it was assumed that the Air Force could answer most of the problems of close support, the Israeli forces lacked adequate artillery, and above all lacked the necessary transporters, so that the artillery available reached the battlefield in the south only on the third and fourth days of battle.

The war taught the incisive lesson that ground forces must be capable of dealing with all problems without depending in any way on the Air Force. Translated into the terms of the field of battle, this requires a very heavy concentration of artillery weapons, so that the Air Force can concentrate on maintaining superiority in the air and intervene in the field of battle in a selective manner.

One error in planning led to another. The importance of moving tanks and guns down to the front in Sinai was obviously not overlooked; but what was

overlooked was the fact that such a move could not take place at the leisurely pace afforded when there is adequate advance warning. Entire formations had to move across Israel to the north and across Sinai to the south on tracks, with the result that they all left a fair percentage of their tracked vehicles stranded for technical reasons, crowding and blocking the main supply routes at critical periods. In 1967 the Israelis had found a railroad line leading across Sinai to the Suez Canal. Incredibly, instead of developing it and planning to move formations to the front on railway flats, the entire line was uprooted to provide a steel covering for the fortifications in the Bar-Lev line. A cursory and very inexpert look at Israel's transport problem strengthens the belief that the country should have given priority to the rapid development of a railroad system, which for some unknown reason remained the Cinderella of its transport network.

The Israel Defence Forces were again not constructed in a balanced fashion. Tremendous investment was made in air and armour, while below in the field there was a lack of fire power, mortars, flame throwers, night-fighting equipment and adequate mobility. Israeli ground forces – unlike for instance the Air Force, a homogeneous, compact force in which each subject is obliged to adapt its development to that of the others – were still based on arms of service with their loyalties and their pressure groups and their positions in planning conferences. The result was that Israeli GHQ operated through ten arms of service requiring ten compromises with all the resultant weaknesses that that brought about.

Contrary to the hasty conclusions published throughout the world after the Yom Kippur War, the tank still remains a dominant factor on the field of battle, provided that it is part of a well-planned battle team which is capable of answering the problems of modern warfare. Indeed, the results achieved by the Sagger anti-tank missile bore no proportion whatsoever to the publicity accorded it. In fact surveys published indicate that less than 25% of the Israeli tanks damaged were hit by such a missile. It was not a new weapon on the battlefield. It had been encountered in the Six Day War and Gen. Raful Eytan, as chief paratroop and infantry officer, had certainly realized its significance and had trained the forces under his command to deal with the threat. He was one of the few Israeli commanders who entered the war fully conscious of the problem of anti-tank missiles and prepared answers for it, with the result that in his division a minimum of losses from such weapons was sustained. Furthermore, he was to activate the only operation of the Israel Defence Forces behind the enemy lines at night, destroying enemy tanks.

The Israeli infantry did not come into its own in the Yom Kippur War On few occasions was it correctly used or to full advantage. Highly trained infantry, such as the paratroopers, was rushed into battle in an improvised,

unprepared manner – as incidentally occurred on a number of occasions in the Six Day war. The Israeli error is highlighted by the fact that in the battle in Sinai the Israel Defence Forces fought exclusively with tanks against five infantry divisions and performed at one and the same time the tasks of defence, holding the front line, and of counter-attack. The fact that they were nevertheless so successful in holding the line only emphasizes the comparatively poor handling of the Arab forces.

In analysing Israel's approach to attack, the impression one gets is that inadequate attention was paid to the possibility of an indirect strategic approach. Israel's borders with the Arabs are some 2,100 miles long, with the armies concentrated along about 250 miles of this length. Little effort was made to create the ability to by-pass these forces and so force the enemy to spread out. In other words, in future every effort must be made to make the forces as versatile and as mobile as possible. Eighty per cent of the Egyptian Army was concentrated along the Canal, either attacking or defending. The answer to this situation must be an indirect operational approach. It is wrong for the Israeli forces to be obliged tactically to attack strongly held defensive positions, such as Missouri or the Chinese Farm. The importance of forcing the enemy to attack well-held and adequately manned defensive positions was emphasized in the battle of 14 October.

Many of the Israeli commanders noted a marked improvement in the standard of fighting of the Arab forces, and particularly of the Egyptian infantry. Because of the rapid and impressive Israeli victories in the past, a number of misconceptions about the Arab forces tended to gain currency. By and large, the Arab forces have invariably been poorly led at the higher level (with the possible exception of the Jordanian Army), but it would be wrong to say that they have not fought well in the past. They never excelled in attack, because this type of warfare calls for an ability to think rapidly, to improvise in the heat of battle, and the willingness of the junior officers to take responsibility and make decisions on the spot. On the other hand, in the defensive type of warfare or in a set-piece attack, they have invariably fought well. In all battles in which the Israelis came up against the Egyptian forces in previously prepared positions fighting a set-piece battle, the Egyptian soldiers fought well. But once the balance and equilibrium of their command had been upset, they tended to break and lose cohesion.

It seems that in their preparation for the Yom Kippur War the Arab armies had learnt these lessons and, accordingly, one of the reasons for the limited plan prepared by the Egyptians was the realization by the command that the development of an involved attack might be beyond their army's capabilities. Because of the emphasis that had been placed on the intellectual ability of the

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officers and men, the Israeli forces faced an Egyptian Army better led at the tactical level than they had known before. Added to this was a marked increase in the standard of discipline and outward smartness, which very naturally enough reflected itself also in the execution of orders on the battlefield. To this was added the sanction of fear, with orders being issued throughout the army that anybody failing to obey a command or withdrawing under fire was to be shot on the spot. These orders were carried out without hesitation both in the Egyptian Army and in the Syrian Army.

The very detailed orders the Egyptians received for the crossing of the Canal, coupled with at least three years of training for the operation, showed that President Sadat had no illusions whatsoever about his army. This fact was emphasized by Gen. Ismail after the war in explaining why the Egyptian Army had not continued to exploit success towards the line of the passes. The débâcle of the Egyptian Army in the attack on 14 October bears out the fact that apart from a very schematic operation the Egyptian Command is not ripe for the handling of major formations in mobile attack requiring manœuvre.

At the higher level the Egyptian strategy was excellent, combining as it did strategic offensive with tactically defensive operations, for as soon as they were across the Canal they deployed in narrow bridgeheads and waited for the Israeli forces to attack. The wide crossing of the Canal dissipated the force of the Israeli Air Force and the very nature of the attack, which obviously could not be disrupted all along the line, guaranteed them a number of footholds. Since no major operation was developed from the bridgeheads, there was no room for the Israeli forces to exercise their superiority in the war of manœuvre.

One field in which the Egyptians had made great advances was that of military intelligence. After the Six Day War, the Soviet Union had reorganized the Egyptian intelligence system and had provided it with modern, sophisticated equipment for all forms of electronic warfare. Radio interception, electronic surveillance and locating equipment were all introduced and attained a satisfactory standard of operation. And in addition to dispatching agents to operate inside Israel, the Arabs also benefited from Soviet surveillance over Israel by means of electronic intelligence ships and satellites.

It is clear from an evaluation of the very considerable amount of intelligence material that fell into Israeli hands during the war that the Egyptians enjoyed a number of considerable successes in this field. Their initial attack was based on a detailed appreciation of the Israeli plan for the defence of the Canal, and indeed one of the plans for its crossing (prepared in Sharon's division in May 1973) was found in their possession. (The plan called for a crossing north of the area of Deversoir, which the Egyptians fortified heavily, leaving the place

where the crossing actually took place lightly held.) Far more serious, perhaps, is the fact that the Israeli code map of Sinai, including the area of the Canal and the west bank, fell into their hands. This code map, prepared in nine copies in 1973, showed all the code names referred to in Israeli radio traffic. The map in its entirety was found during the war translated into Arabic, and this boon was compounded by the fact that Israeli signal security over the radio was extremely lax during the war, leading to a number of tragic situations.

The general consensus was that the Syrians also fought better than they had done in the past because they had been specifically trained for the mission before them and did not deviate from it. In general the Syrian Command revealed a degree of daring not previously seen. The individual Syrian soldier proved to be brave, but the standard of their tank crews was very low. Like all Arab armies, they never departed from the doctrine implanted in them, and when the situations for which they were not prepared arose they proved in general to be at a loss. Their reply to the problems posed by the superiority of the Israeli forces was the scope and strength of their attack. For years before the war they had trained for a set-piece attack on a fixed model, based on wave after wave of tanks advancing regardless of what had happened to the previous wave. Thus the advance never stopped. This was the problem that faced Avigdor in his historic battle.

At most stages in the fighting the Syrian force acted as a well-disciplined army. The withdrawal which they carried out into Syria was orderly and controlled, but sometimes they were over-systematic. Both at Nafekh and in the 7th Brigade sector, the attacks they mounted one after the other were invariably of the same nature. Many of the Israeli forces in the north were surprised by their Sagger anti-tank missiles, although this should not have been the case because Northern Command had faced this problem in the various fire fights that had taken place previously. This highlighted a problem in the Israel Defence Forces – that of failing to apply lessons that should have been learned.

While the Syrians fought well as individuals, there is no justification for the exaggerated degree of praise which was heaped on the Syrian forces after the war, particularly abroad and to a lesser degree in Israel. When they launched their attack all the factors they could have hoped for were in their favour. Because of the nature of the fighting and the piecemeal supply of equipment and units, on no day in the battle did the Israeli Northern Command fight with more than half its tank force. There were days when the total force was much less. Raful's division on no day numbered more than 150 tanks. The Syrians outnumbered the Israeli forces in armour by 12:1 at times, fighting against an enemy depleted and disorganized because of the element of surprise and his failure to mobilize reserves in time. They fought under a mis-de-

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umbrella which limited Israeli air intervention. They had crushing superiority in artillery. They were near success at times, but their armoured forces proved to be completely inadequate in battle against the better-trained and highly flexible Israeli commanders and tank crews.

It must be emphasized that the main element in limiting the scope of the Egyptian operation was the Israeli Air Force. It obliged the Egyptians to concentrate so much on the construction of a surface-to-air missile system to provide an umbrella for their forces. It was the force which dictated the limits of the Egyptian advance and this dictation would have been valid even if the Israeli Air Force had not made one pass over the battlefield. That they had been justified in limiting themselves to the area covered by the missile umbrella was proved to them when the Israeli Air Force twice destroyed their advancing forces pushing southwards along the Gulf of Suez.

In all considerations of future strategy along the Sinai front, Israeli thinking had been coloured very considerably by the War of Attrition. It was this war more than the future Yom Kippur War that the Israeli planners saw in their mind's eye, because of the assumption in the General Staff that the Egyptians would not attempt to cross the Canal until they enjoyed air superiority in Sinai, which would not be achieved till 1975. Herein lay one of the basic errors of Israeli evaluation of Arab strategy – a failure to appreciate that the Egyptians would decide on a limited military solution to their problem based on the missile umbrella, and would accordingly develop a limited strategy. The mistake of the Israeli General Staff was to judge the Arab General Staff by its own standards of military thinking; they did not envisage that the Arabs would come to the conclusion that they could achieve their war aim by a limited strategy under the cover of a missile umbrella.

In 1973 the Israeli doctrine of deterrent had proved to be a failure. The Arabs had analysed the deterrent factors in the Israeli defence posture and had prepared solutions for them, the main one being strategic and operational surprise, after which they planned to utilize the mechanism of international diplomacy in order to take advantage of any situation that would develop in their favour. In this they succeeded. They planned their offensives in such a manner as to ensure that the Israeli forces in the line would be inadequate to smash their attack before the deployment of international political forces. The Israeli post-war explanation of their failure to deter was that from an economic point of view it would have been impossible for Israel to have maintained the IDF fully mobilized along the front lines; the command strategy was based on receiving adequate advance warning, which would guarantee the mobilization of the reserve forces in time. This 'all or nothing' attitude of the Israeli defence and military leadership proved to be a grave error. There were solutions in

between which could have been applied according to the developments on the Arab side, as for instance partial mobilizations for different periods to answer different sets of circumstances, such as Arab exercises along the borders. This lack of flexibility was reflected by their behaviour in this respect before the war and was in marked contrast to the steps taken when war threatened in May 1973.

The intensity of the war took the quartermaster staffs by surprise. The expenditure of ammunition was inordinately high, the losses of aircraft were serious, the figures of tanks destroyed were alarming. It was clear that the staff tables on the basis of which equipment and ammunition had been stockpiled over the years required drastic revision. Some weeks later Gen. Dayan was to make an ill-advised public admission that Israeli forces had run out of certain items of ammunition and that but for American supplies the country would have been in a very serious situation. The public was horrified at the revelation of the lack of foresight which such a statement implied.

The Arabs had obviously planned their resupply from the Soviet Union in advance, for but a few days after the outbreak of war a major Soviet airlift was under way as giant Antonov 22 cargo carriers landed at short intervals in Damascus and Cairo. They flew from the Soviet Union, staged in Budapest and thence across Yugoslavia to Cairo and Damascus. Soviet ships loaded with thousands of tons of equipment passed through the Bosphorus Straits on their way to Latakia and Alexandria.

The flow of supplies to Israel however was not so smooth. As the seriousness of the situation became evident to the Israeli staff, particularly in respect of certain medium artillery and tank ammunition, the Israeli ambassador in Washington was shuttling desperately to and fro between the State Department, the White House and the Pentagon in a frantic endeavour to cut the knots of bureaucracy and enable the flow to reach Israel. It was not until Saturday, 13 October, that the first flight of C5 Galaxy planes carrying supplies took off for Israel. During the period of one month from 14 October to 14 November the United States Air Force transported 22,000 tons of arms and ammunition in more than 560 sorties loaded with tanks, artillery, helicopters and many other items. Large quantities also reached Israel by sea.

This airlift was obviously of vital importance militarily to Israel at a critical juncture, but perhaps its major significance was a political one. Its unequivocal nature, as seen by the Soviets and the Arabs, who were unaware of the hesitation and foot-dragging that had taken place in Washington for a full and fateful week of fighting, was undoubtedly a major factor in bringing about a cease-fire and in turning the United States into the central figure on the stage of the Middle East in the months subsequent to the war.

An analysis of the events leading up to the Yom Kippur War points to two

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major errors. The first was the fatal error in intelligence evaluation and the failure at the command level and the ministerial level to appreciate the significance of the parallel developments on the Syrian and Egyptian fronts. One of the incredible facts of the period is that at no stage and at no level, so far as can be seen or evaluated from available material, did any element link the Syrian build-up in the north (which had so disturbed the minister of defence following the warnings of Gen. Hofi) with the unusual Egyptian activity and concentrations in the south. It was as if the assumption that the Arab armies could not or would not go to war caused a complete mental black-out. None of the elements involved can escape responsibility. The dogmatic manner in which a concept was adhered to influenced all concerned, despite the better instincts of those who were further removed from the direct task of evaluating intelligence, such as the minister of defence and the chief of staff. Both had at various times during 1973 expressed anxiety about Arab preparations and talked about imminent war, and yet when the indications of such a war abounded they allowed themselves – because of their erroneous evaluation in April and May, and perhaps also because of an uncomfortable feeling over mobilizing the nation during the High Holy Days – to limit preparations to the standing army only. The interesting element here is that there was no thought of some form of interim mobilization to provide an additional measure of security along the borders. The thinking seemed to be in terms of all or nothing. What emerges, too, is that there was no insistence on mobilization at any level in the General Staff during the fateful days before the war.

The reason for this laxity lay in the second major error, which was the stubborn assumption of the Israeli defence and military establishment that the unrealistic and unfavourable ratio of forces along the borders was adequate to hold any Egyptian or Syrian attack. This in turn was based on erroneous readings of developments in the field of war, particularly of the Air Force's ability to deal with the surface-to-air missile systems, and a failure to appreciate the significance of various developments, such as the construction of the high rampart on the Egyptian side of the Canal. The latter was interpreted as a defensive measure, when in fact it constituted a very important element in the operation of the Egyptian anti-tank missile system against both the first and second lines of the Israeli defence. Gen. Gonen – and apparently Gen. Mandler earlier – had warned about this development and urged counter-measures on the Israeli side, particularly along the second line of defence, but it was too late.

After the war President Sadat was to describe the elevation of the main rampart along the Canal as the first practical move in the preparation of its crossing. 'The Israelis mocked at our building activity saying that the Egyptians always like to build pyramids,' he said, 'but these ramparts were most important

in exposing the enemy and for military uses to which the enemy paid no attention. . . . Our control of the west bank by means of these ramparts which were completed by the end of February 1973 . . . was complete.'

The Israeli error began with a basic concept about Arab inability or unwillingness to attack. Every new development in the intelligence evaluation was adapted to this concept, instead of being evaluated independently. As a result, Arab preparations were misread. But it must be remembered that, as an additional insurance policy, everybody involved in decision enjoyed a sense of security about the ability of the standing army in the line, together with what was considered to be an adequate number of tanks, to deal with any eventuality and the ability of the Air Force to deal a resounding blow to the enemy. This 'insurance policy', however, was based on a misreading of technological developments and on a misevaluation of the scope of the planned Arab attack both in manpower and in equipment. Although these factors were known arithmetically, they were not translated into operational terms by the Israeli Command. The Israeli thinking also revealed a complete lack of appreciation of the new anti-tank capability within the Arab forces.

From these two errors emerged many of the mistakes which were to be highlighted in the war. The army was ready for an orderly mobilization in seventy-two to ninety-six hours, but the improvised mobilization, which was brilliant, heroic and saved the country, by its very nature caused formations to be thrown piecemeal into battle. This gave rise to a feeling of inadequacy in mobilization, which was unjustified; for the very strength of the system was revealed in exactly the circumstances in which the mobilization was carried out.

At the same time, many weaknesses were revealed. A laxity had grown in the IDF, permitting the retention of semi-trained reservists in the front line along the Suez Canal when the situation was sufficiently serious to warrant the highest degree of alert. There was also a lack of discipline, which had long been expressed in the very high ratio of deaths (hundreds annually) in road accidents and training accidents. Over the past few years there was a tendency for the senior command of the armed forces to slacken on discipline and to accept a state of indiscipline rather than impose its will. The outward appearance of the troops, the high ratio of accidents involving human lives, the state of maintenance of buildings and vehicles, all these should have given an indication of something deeper going on within the armed forces. This writer was a lone voice in drawing public attention to this portent. There was little or no reaction, and to this day such matters make little impression on those bodies responsible for the public supervision of the armed forces. Combat discipline has always been and continues to be superb, but the fact that slackness in administrative

discipline invariably increases the casualty rate arouses little comment or reaction in Israel.

Most important, the rapid turnover of senior officers seemed to have become an end in itself so far as the Israeli High Command was concerned. Well-tried and highly experienced officers at the peak of their ability were replaced in order to increase rotation within the higher ranks of the armed forces. The result was that in time of war some potentially able officers lacking experience suddenly found themselves in positions for which they were not completely mature, while highly experienced officers were onlookers.

A Public Commission of Inquiry headed by the President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Shmuel Agranat, spent many months in apportioning responsibility. It had access to all officers and all documents, and therefore no attempt will be made here to compete with it. Yet although the Agranat Commission absolved the minister of defence of all responsibility for the failings that preceded the outbreak of war, it would seem inconceivable to a Western reader that any minister of defence – however able, however brilliant and however effective – could avoid ministerial responsibility for what occurred.

Dayan is a man of unusual ability who preferred to focus on certain aspects of his job and ignore all others. On the other hand, he tended to try to share responsibility with various functionaries – highlighted by his custom of being accompanied to Cabinet meetings by the chief of staff and the director of intelligence – creating a situation in which he could say: 'They said it, I didn't.' He developed the brilliantly successful Israeli policy in the occupied territories, which interested him. He took a direct interest in the front line whenever it erupted and in the army's planning and operations. But as a minister he took little interest in the day-to-day life of the army, impatient of the details which go into the management of the largest single organization in the country. Matters of routine, discipline, training, housekeeping and general administration bored him. He would evince an interest in the number of tanks available, but not in the state of the tanks. He relied entirely on the chief of staff and the General Staff, in addition to his own staff, without appreciating that in a parliamentary democracy the responsibility for these matters fell on him too. Likewise, in all matters of military preparedness and intelligence evaluations, he was responsible to the prime minister and the Cabinet.

The shock of the war caused something to snap in Dayan. The initial Arab onslaught and success threw him into a fit of pessimism, which coloured his evaluations right through the war. He spent a considerable amount of time in the front line, away from the nerve centre, frequently creating an air of pessimism around him and giving advice which, had it been taken, could have changed the course of the war and would have left Israel without the trump cards

that proved to be so valuable in the disengagement negotiations. It is difficult to evaluate the logic behind his thinking, issuing a directive in May to prepare for war in late 1973 and then, in the light of all the intelligence in the first week of October and on Yom Kippur morning, opposing the total mobilization demanded by the chief of staff, thus causing the loss of valuable hours of mobilization time. Dayan was repeatedly indecisive. On the morning of Yom Kippur he told Mrs Meir that he was 'against total mobilization but he would not resign'; he left the decision about the attack into Syria on Wednesday 10 October, to her; he declared that he would 'not make a *jihad*' against the crossing of the Suez Canal by the Israeli forces although he opposed it. Had his suggestion on the first day for withdrawal to the line of the passes in Sinai been accepted, the subsequent Israeli crossing of the Canal would have been impossible. He misread the political developments, maintaining all through the war that there would be no cease-fire.

In his favour it should be said that he read the international situation, with particular reference to the Soviet Union, as the political general he is. But militarily he moved from the extreme of complete confidence that the ratio of forces along the fronts was adequate to deal with the Arab attacks to a state of complete depression and a lack of confidence in the same forces a day later. His very cautious nature was unable to stand up to the challenge of bitter reality in time of stress. Formally, he might not be responsible for the mistake of the ratio of forces along the front line and for the preparations along it; but in fact he considered himself as a super-chief of staff, acted as such, and stated as much on many occasions. When Gen. Hofi was unhappy about the situation in the north, Dayan flew to inspect the front line with the chief of staff and decided to reinforce the area with units of the 7th Brigade; his interest and involvement in the line along the Suez Canal should not have been any less. On many occasions his instincts both about appointments and other developments in the armed forces were correct, but strangely enough, and contrary to popular conceptions, he hesitated to impose his will.

This major weakness in his make-up was expressed time and again both before and during the war. The famous Israeli cartoonist, Zeev, perhaps summed him up best of all by invariably portraying him as a Hamletian 'to be or not to be' figure torn by doubts. His very powerful charisma had tended to cover up many basic weaknesses in his character and had helped him overcome situations which other less attractive personalities could never have survived.

After the war Dayan went out of his way to praise Mrs Meir, and justifiably so, because it was to a great degree her strength of character and ability to remain composed in the most difficult circumstances which counteracted Dayan's pessimistic nature and his jeremiads. Mrs Meir's method of government

brought about a system whereby there were no checks and balances and no alternative evaluations. Her doctrinaire, inflexible approach to problems and to government was to contribute to the failings of the government before the war. She was very much the overbearing mother who ruled the roost with an iron hand. She had little idea of orderly administration and preferred to work closely with her cronies, creating an *ad hoc* system of government based on what was known as her 'kitchen'. But once war had broken out these very traits proved to be an asset. She was strong and adamant and gave the country the powerful leadership it required both in time of war and in the involved post-war political negotiations. On many occasions she, a woman who had reached seventy-five, found herself thrust into a position where she had to decide between differing military options proposed by professionals. She decided, and invariably decided well, drawing on a large measure of common sense which had stood her in good stead.

David Elazar, like his minister, undoubtedly bears responsibility for the erroneous evaluation, although like his minister not all the intelligence was available to him and they were both misled by the totally mistaken evaluations of Military Intelligence. The fact that others in the General Staff acquiesced in the level of forces held along the borders did not in any way diminish his overall responsibility as commander of the forces. However, once it was clear that war would break out, he acted decisively, calling for an immediate general mobilization; and five very valuable hours were lost because of his argument on this issue with Dayan. It is clear that the process of erosion which had affected the army had not escaped the General Staff. The omissions of the intelligence division have been trumpeted far and wide; but the standard of troops in the front line in Sinai, the state of preparedness of the units, the level of discipline in reporting, and the state of equipment in many of the reserve stores all point an accusing finger at the various divisions of the General Staff. And while the chief of staff bears the responsibility for his staff, there has been a tendency after the war to focus the accusing finger exclusively at Elazar, when an objective analysis of the situation at the General Staff level reveals many faults and omissions.

Once in the war, Gen. Elazar proved himself to have stability and strength of character in the most trying circumstances, never losing his composure and asserting his authority throughout the armed forces. His competent handling of the war was cautious and foresighted, and he finally led his forces to a situation which enabled Israel to enter political negotiations on a better basis than might have been envisaged at the outset of the war. Elazar's decision to direct Peled's division to the north on the morning of Sunday, 7 October, and the decision to move over to counter-attack at a very early stage, were the two

major command decisions that saved the northern front. He has been criticized for preoccupying himself on the eve of the war with plans for counter-attack; in fact his preoccupation with mounting such counter-attacks and his ability to think ahead several days during the battle was one of the factors which guided the Israeli forces to victory.

Gen. Gonen was an unfortunate war casualty. His tragedy was that he arrived in Southern Command a year too late and was still in the process of getting to know his command when war broke out. The absurdity of the rotation policy in the IDF is highlighted by the fact that the GOC Command (Sharon) and the divisional commander responsible for the front (Mandler) were both to be relieved within less than three months of each other. It seems that many of the accusations levelled against Gonen were done so with the wisdom of hindsight. According to these accusations, the fact was deprecated that his actions in the fateful weeks before the outbreak of war do not indicate an awareness of the gravity of the situation developing along the Suez Canal. However neither he nor any other senior officer in the armed forces believed that war was imminent. On Thursday 4 October he attended a meeting of the General Staff which was devoted entirely to the problem of discipline in the armed forces. And on Friday he heard an intelligence evaluation that the possibility of war was 'the lowest of the low'. Many of his requests for reinforcements were turned down, a fact which in itself indicated how GHQ viewed possible developments along the borders.

The impression that an outsider obtains from an examination of developments during the war is that he was later unfairly treated publicly. His behaviour before and during the war did not warrant the degree of criticism directed exclusively at him. Like most other senior commanders he bears his share of responsibility for mistakes and errors in judgement, and is entitled to his share of the credit for many good decisions and successful operations. He is a courageous, tough, able and professional officer who was unlucky. Had the war broken out three months earlier, he would probably have emerged with laurel wreaths as a divisional commander, as he had emerged from his previous wars.

Gen. Sharon's outstanding ability as a field commander notwithstanding, the fact that he publicly discredited the chief of staff and his personal representative, Gen. Bar-Lev, the GOC Command and other senior commanders tends to make his views about other officers somewhat suspect and to reflect more on him than on the targets of his criticism. An analysis of many of his arguments with his superiors reveals that he understood his enemy; but in the light of the realities on the battlefield he was at times very unrealistic and tended to take risks which Israel could not afford. His personal leadership, bravery, determination,

and inspiration to his men mark him out for what he is – an outstanding field commander. But his attitude towards his colleagues, his public behaviour and his accusations raise a question mark in an evaluation of his character. In the circumstances few commanders would have persevered with the crossing of the Suez Canal as he did so very successfully and with his usual drive and perseverance.

Gen. Chaim Bar-Lev emerges from the war as a sound, solid and able commander, whose personal authority, human approach and command ability were instrumental in controlling a potentially unstable command situation in Southern Command. His quiet and cool handling of it marks him out for what he is, a leader with strong nerves in times of crisis.

In the final analysis, the criticism that has been expressed on the various aspects of the war cannot be allowed to cloud the fact that the Israeli armed forces won the most striking victory in their history. (Had the Israeli forces but been mobilized in time, the Arab attack would have been destroyed at the outset, and all the failings of the Israeli leadership and forces since noted, would have been ignored.) The Arab attack took place in the best possible circumstances. A force roughly equivalent to the total of the NATO European forces launched a surprise attack against a small country with a population unready and with an army unmobilized. On the Israeli forces descended a mass of armour, backed by all the technology that the Soviet Union could make available and with the knowledge that a massive Soviet sea and air lift was ready to move into operation immediately after the outbreak of hostilities. Despite this the people and army of Israel mobilized in one of the most impressive mobilizations in history, rushed from prayer to war, conducted a most heroic defensive battle, and on the third day were moving over to the counter-attack. And while the total mobilization was proceeding apace, by dint of previous organization the country succeeded in continuing to function, with industrial production being maintained at 70% of the pre-war level and with a high degree of normality being observed in the day-to-day life. The skies were free of enemy aircraft.

As Israel fought back against the Soviet-supported Arab armies, the forces of the Western world, who live under the same shadow under which Israel lives, reacted with a few exceptions in a cowardly and selfish manner, giving adequate indications what type of reaction might be expected from them if the Soviet Union were to decide to launch its forces nearer home in Europe. In many ways the Israeli officers and troops were fighting for more than the existence and freedom of Israel alone. Only the United States appreciated the significance of Israel's struggle. Paradoxically enough, the courageous and unequivocal American stand in favour of Israel gave the United States a standing in the Arab world such as it had not known before, and showed the countries

of Western Europe in their craven and abject surrender to the Arab sheikhs to be the weak, leaderless and divided community they are.

Those who were at fault cannot escape the blame of history – the price for their omission has not yet been fully paid. Because of these mistakes, Israel lost a unique position of strength in its history from which it could have negotiated for the future. It may well have yet to pay a heavier price.

But it would be wrong not to give those who may bear a share of the blame a share of the credit for the incredible success of the IDF in such unbelievably adverse circumstances. Above all, credit is due to the commanders, the officers and the men who physically blocked the advance of the attacking armies and performed with such unselfish bravery and gallantry, saving a nation and leading an army to victory.

The tragedy of the post-war situation is that the Arab armies, which would have suffered a most humiliating defeat, had the IDF been mobilized and in position, have translated their initial successes into a major victory, when in fact they were saved from total defeat by the intervention of the Soviet Union and the Security Council. The danger is that they will not draw the correct lessons and conclusions from the war, carried away as they are in a euphoria of victory which is imaginary. Such euphoria carries within it the seeds of future conflict, unless a wise leadership can give to the Arab world a new and balanced approach.

Yet the implications of the Yom Kippur War affect a much wider public than just the Egyptians, Syrians and the Israelis. Gen. Dayan once said that the key to war in the Middle East is in the hands of the Soviets, while the key to peace is held by the United States. This evaluation, which was made after the Six Day War, is no less valid to this day. If any point emerges quite clearly from an analysis of the events leading up to the war, and indeed of the years between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, it is that the Soviet Union has played a central role in creating the conditions for war in the Middle East Its purpose was, and is, not so much for or against any given party in the area, but a function of its global strategy. The geopolitical importance of the countries of the Middle East; the Mediterranean, to which Soviet eyes have been directed for centuries; the Suez Canal, affording a potential link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, which in the context of the Soviet struggle with China has assumed considerable importance; and the oil supplies in the Middle East, and particularly in the Persian Gulf, have combined to make the Middle East of vital importance to the Soviet Union. If one adds to this the fact that the Soviet Union borders on Middle Eastern countries (one of which is a member of NATO) and the experience of the Soviet-encouraged Arab oil blockade exercised during and following the Yom Kippur War, the value of the area to the Soviet Union cannot be overemphasized.

By Nasser's own admission, the Soviet Union played a major part in bringing on the Six Day War and taking advantage of the débâcle to strengthen their hold on the Arab world, advising the Egyptians against any accommodation with Israel and offering full support to reconstruct their armed forces and enable them to go to war again. **A student of the developments in the Middle East will invariably note that whenever voices were heard in favour of accommodation and peace, a Soviet delegation would descend on the area and attitudes would again harden. Many such visits were followed by an escalation of the military situation, as in the case of Foreign Minister Gromyko's long visit to Cairo early in 1969 shortly before the War of Attrition began and to Damascus in March 1974 before the Syrian front erupted in a War of Attrition as disengagement talks were about to commence.** Over the years the Soviet Union built up the Arab armies for the specific purpose of going to war, pouring the most sophisticated weaponry available into the Middle East, leading from one escalation to another.

It is not really important whether or not at any given point it was convenient for the Soviet Union that the Arabs go to war or whether or not attempts were made to restrain them. **The Soviets had become so heavily involved in the Arab world at every level of military preparation that at a certain point their opinion as to whether or not war was desirable became immaterial.** In principle, they agreed that the Arabs should be ready for an offensive war, and they made available all that was required to embark on a war of major dimensions. Thus while many in the world were deluding themselves into believing that a new era of détente had dawned, the Soviets formally assumed responsibility for the air defence of Egypt in January 1970. And a month before the Nixon–Brezhnev meeting in May 1972, President Sadat was invited to a meeting in Moscow at which he received the Soviet Union's agreement in principle to go to war. Leonid Brezhnev then blithely proceeded to sign a document known as 'The Basic Principles of Relations Between The United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', which includes the statement that 'the USA and the USSR have a special responsibility to do everything in their power so that conflicts or situations will not arise which would serve to increase international tensions'.

Within a year of the 1972 summit meeting, the Soviet Union was supplying the Egyptian and Syrian armies with the weapons they believed essential in order to go to war. **The Soviet decision to supply Scud missiles to Egypt – three months before the 1973 summit meeting – was a conscious act designed to remove any Egyptian hesitation about going to war.** Sadat had planned to go to war in May 1973 but he decided on a postponement because as he put it in an interview in *Akhbar El Yom* in August 1974: 'then the Soviets set the date for

the Second Summit Meeting with Nixon in Washington for the month of May, and for political reasons which it is not necessary to reveal at this point I decided to postpone the date . . .' At the same time President Assad made a secret visit to Moscow and the result of his visit was the stepped-up supply of a complete surface-to-air missile system which was rushed to Syria in the months of July and August 1973.

While a gullible world – and to a very great degree a highly gullible American administration and people – were being soft-spoken by Mr Brezhnev in his toasts about peace and friendship and his reassertion that both countries would concentrate on keeping international tensions to a minimum, the Soviet Union was consciously and actively preparing the stage for a new confrontation in the Middle East.

There are many indications that in the third week of September 1973 the top echelon in the Soviet Union was fully aware of the Egyptian plan to go to war. On 21 September the Italian Communist Party newspaper, *Unità*, published an item stating that Brezhnev had lengthened his visit to Bulgaria in order to meet President Sadat of Egypt. Despite later Soviet denials of this story, it seems fair to assume that at this meeting Brezhnev and Sadat finalized arrangements for Soviet support and reaction to various aspects of the impending military operation. This story also ties in with reports received in the Italian Foreign Ministry that during this visit Mr Brezhnev co-ordinated arrangements with the Bulgarians for the planned Soviet airlift. In fact on 2 October an English-language release by the Bulgarian Press Agency reported Syrian and Egyptian preparations for an imminent attack. It would appear that this report had come about as a result of a slip-up somewhere because it was immediately suppressed.

During the week before the war, the launching of the Cosmos satellites by the Soviet Union to cover the Israeli front lines in the north and in the south, the departure of Soviet ships from Egyptian ports, the sailing of a Soviet electronic intelligence ship northwards from Egypt and the hurried and hasty departure of the families of the Soviet advisers of Egypt and Syria after the respective Soviet ambassadors had been notified of the imminence of war combine to add credence to a picture of Soviet connivance, and certainly an intimate knowledge of the preparations for war.

Once war had broken out, the massive Soviet airlift to Egypt and Syria moved into operation smoothly without the improvisation and the frantic negotiations that characterized the American airlift to Israel. Soviet ships, which must have been readied in the Black Sea ports before the outbreak of war, loaded equipment prepared in stores before the outbreak of war, and were already unloading in Syrian ports on Thursday, 11 October. This fact, more

than any other, testifies to the advance connivance and the careful preparation which had gone into the supply plan of the operation. And during the war when the Syrian capital was threatened by Israeli forces, both Israeli and American intelligence learnt of the alerting of three Soviet airborne divisions.

The bare and grim fact emerges that during all the toasting at the summit meetings between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Soviets were playing a sinister game of deception and flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the 'Basic Principles' of détente, signed in May 1972 – at their insistence. Seldom have nations been misled in such an open manner. The mirage of détente was avidly pursued by many leaders and statesmen for their respective purposes and expedient reasons. But only the very naïve can continue to believe in the sincerity of the Kremlin. For in fact no détente – or at best a one-sided détente – existed, and the Soviets proceed to make a mockery of practically every word in the 'Basic Principles' agreed to at the 1972 summit. Now, as then, détente is at best a convenient myth, at worst a dangerous illusion.

It is fair to assume that the interest of the Soviet Union in obtaining a cease-fire on the first day of the war (ostensibly because the Syrians had asked them to arrange it, although Sadat maintained that the Syrians denied this) and later the alleged agreement of the Soviet Union to the American initiative of 13 October were guided by the Soviet reading of the possible results if the battle were to continue. They viewed the war free from the euphoria that beclouded the Arab thinking. Throughout the war and immediately after, Soviet actions and reactions were guided by a very clear evaluation of the military situation. They threw their full weight behind a continuation of the war when it seemed to favour the Arabs. They hastened supplies and (as when Brezhnev urged on President Boumedienne of Algeria to be more active) encouraged other Arabs to increase their support and to wield the oil weapon. They moved rapidly to stop the war – even to the point of creating tension that might lead to a nuclear confrontation – only when they realized that the Egyptian Third Army was doomed to collapse because of the tactical situation. It would appear too that the Soviet moves immediately after the war – including their insistence on the stationing of Soviet and American troops in the area and their threat to move seven airborne divisions to Egypt – were further attempts to re-establish their presence, which had been so diminished after the withdrawal of some 20,000 of their troops from Egypt in July 1972.

Through the Geneva talks, the Soviet Union has become a party to the negotiations for a settlement in the Middle East. Its strategy seems to be to allow the United States to occupy the centre of the stage and to extract as much as possible from Israel without having recourse to Soviet pressures. It is quite clear, however, that the Soviet Union will do everything possible to

prevent any move that might prejudice its position as the principal supplier of arms to the Arabs. Hence any settlement – either to create a peaceful situation or even just lessen the importance of arms supplies – would appear to be prejudicial to the interests of the Soviet Union. Furthermore the Soviets will use the Palestinian issue and the Palestine Liberation Organization (whose leader, Yasser Arafat, was given a state reception in Moscow in the summer of 1974) in order to endanger the regime of King Hussein in Jordan and as a major element to be manœuvred as they see fit in influencing the direction of negotiations in the Israeli–Arab conflict.

A main strategic interest of the Soviet Union in the region lies in the Persian Gulf. Its main base for the development of operations in the Gulf, both from an expansionist point of view and from that of denying the oil of the Gulf states to the West and Japan, is Iraq. The main supply line from the Soviet Union to Iraq is via the Syrian port of Latakia and across Syria. The Soviets are investing huge sums of money in developing this base and they have attempted to bridge the gap between the two opposing factions of the Baath Party which rule in Syria and in Iraq in order to strengthen their hold on these two countries – for they outflank the eastern extremity of NATO in Turkey and act as a counter-threat to the growing power of the Persian Armed Forces encouraged and supported by the United States.

The Middle East conflict emphasizes a determined and unrelenting Soviet threat to the security of the whole of Europe, a fact which the European countries failed to appreciate and to which they failed in their ignominy to react. For so far as the leaders of the Kremlin were concerned, the war was basically a side show in which their weapons could be tested, Western technology evaluated and Western reactions to such a crisis gauged. The cowardly and pusillanimous European reaction to the Soviet moves must have been the most encouraging aspect of the Middle East war for the Soviet Union, while the unequivocal and forceful United States reaction, including the unexpected arms resupply mounted to Israel, was undoubtedly its least encouraging aspect.

The unprecedented magnitude of Soviet armament can be gauged by the fact that within a matter of months the Soviet Union had resupplied Syria with the number of tanks it had lost in the war – some 1,200 – and added more. This followed vast shipments of tanks to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Somalia, India, Yemen and South Yemen, not to mention many other countries, for a total of thousands of tanks, over the period of one year. Such enormous potential must be seen contrasted with the situation reported by the special subcommittee on the Middle East of the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee in 1974: '. . . There is only one producer of tanks in the United States for the United States Army, and the present production rate is 30 a month, or

360 a year.' The total annual tank production in France is similar – some 300 a year. The size and scope of the Soviet arms production facilities obviously leaves the West frighteningly far behind.

It is against these sombre facts of Soviet involvement in the Middle East war that the West must view its future. The passage of time has not diminished Soviet imperialist aims, but has tended to dull Western awareness of the dangers. There is a vital lesson for the West in the Yom Kippur War, and the countries of Western Europe will remain independent only to the degree that they can appreciate the implications of that bloody confrontation and draw incisive conclusions.

As for the Middle East, it faces not only dangers but great challenges. The basic issue remains as it always had in the past: do the Arabs want peace? Do they recognize Israel's right to exist? The historian will find that Israel has never been the element to block peace moves. Israeli reactions may not always have been the most immediate or sophisticated, but Israel has never once failed to react favourably to the possibility of peace. The basic problem has been and continues to be Arab insistence that Israel has no right to exist. The extreme Arab states such as Syria, Iraq and Libya, not to mention the Palestine Liberation Organization, base themselves on the Palestine Covenant, in which the dismantling of the State of Israel is a basic tenet. The more sophisticated Arabs such as the Egyptians and Jordanians, engage in Arab semantics in order to distinguish between different forms of peace, thus enabling them to prevaricate and avoid a clear answer to the question of whether or not Israel has the right to exist and whether or not they are prepared for a true peace with Israel.

Over the years the Arabs have become more sophisticated in their approach, having realized that an insistence on pushing the Israelis into the sea has prejudiced their propaganda campaign against Israel. Instead they had adopted the theory of stages, with the first stage being the withdrawal of Israel to the 1967 lines. Still, the objective remains the same, as evidenced most recently by Yasser Arafat's speech to the UN General Assembly in November 1974, when he reasserted, in effect, the Arab programme to destroy the Jewish state. Israel has every intention of making a determined effort to reach peace, but it dare not enter the new phase with any illusions about Arab intentions. Only when Arab actions indicate a willingness to modify their attitude to the basic issue of the existence of the State of Israel will it be possible for Israel to make concessions.

In the interim the Israelis have learned their lesson, and it will be a very unwise government and military establishment that allows the first-strike option to remain exclusively in Arab hands. The Middle East is entering a phase of military sophistication that can wreak havoc and chaos to a degree undreamt of hitherto, and extending well beyond the narrow confines of the field of battle. Civilian populations will be exposed to no less a degree than the military forces in any future war. This situation places upon Israel the burden of inevitably possessing a first-strike option and at the same time, whatever the scope of the attack and nature of the weapons used, a second-strike capability. The intensity of destruction of the weapons available to both sides today can, in itself ultimately act as a deterrent in the Middle East, provided that Israel maintains a very high state of preparedness with all options open. Another hopeful factor is the fact that in the initial successes of the Yom Kippur War the Arabs regained their national honour, and this may ultimately facilitate the development of a dialogue and negotiations between the two sides.

Only time can tell whether or not these negotiations will succeed. That Israel has reached a stage of negotiation with the Arab world at all is due to the incredible military victory gained on the field of battle in the Yom Kippur War. Caught surprised and unaware, and despite the initial reverses and heavy losses, the Israeli people, military command and, above all, fighting men rallied, turned the tide and brought on a victory that saved the nation. Many of the great events in a 4,000-year-old history pale into insignificance beside what was achieved on the battlefield in the Yom Kippur War. Israel has every right to draw courage and faith for the future from its performance in what the Israelis may well remember as their war of atonement.